

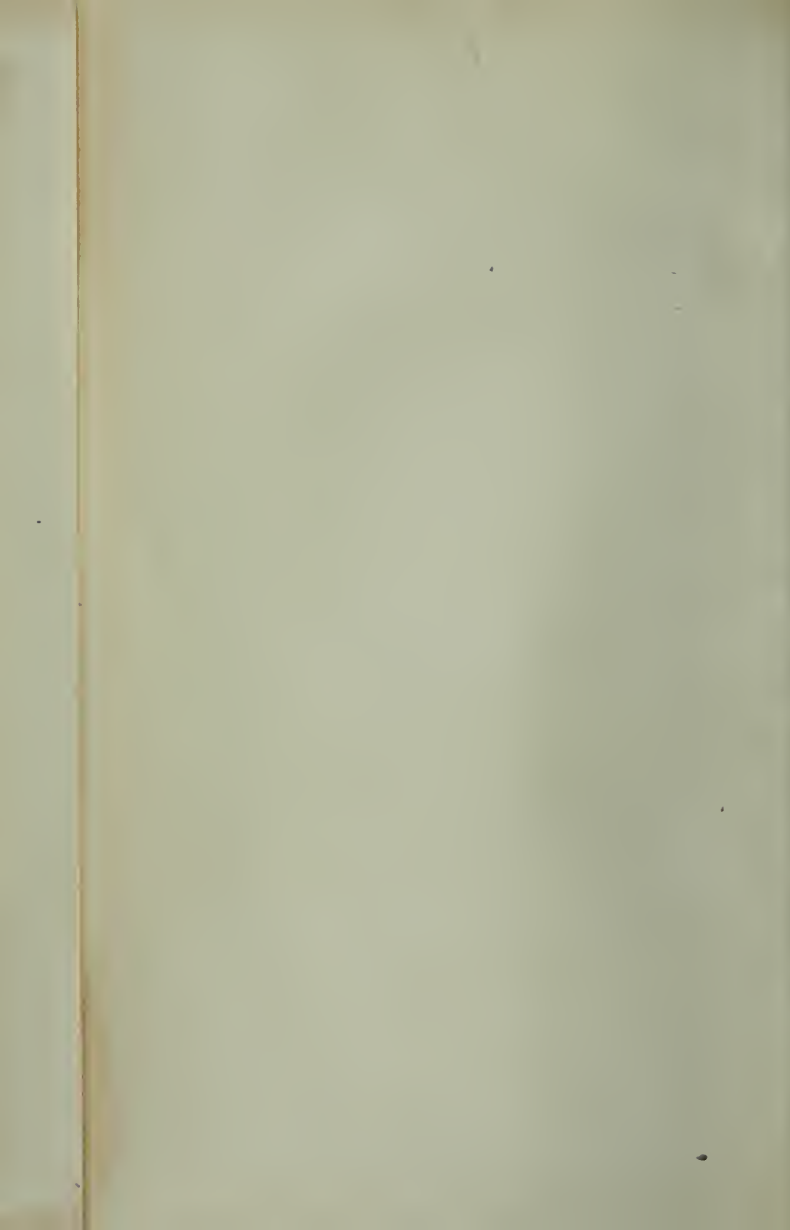
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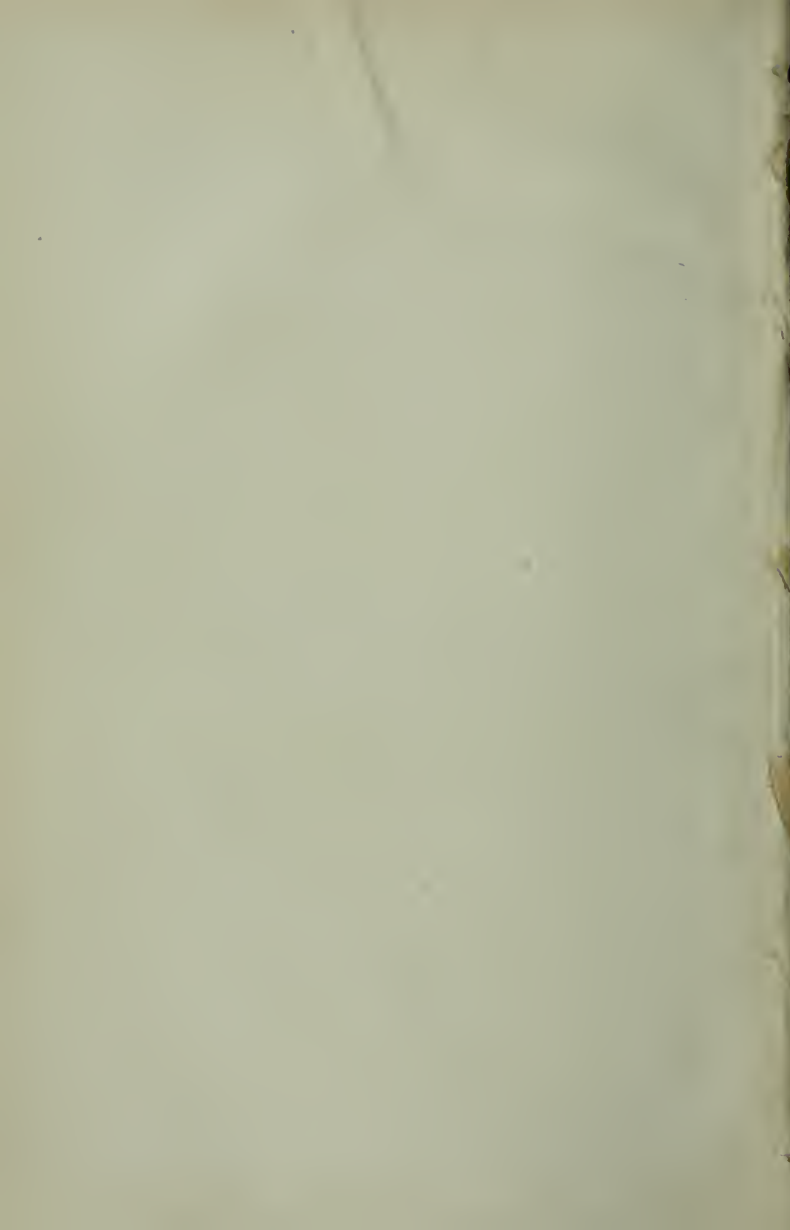




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THE KING'S REVENGE



THE KING'S REVENGE

BY

CLAUDE BRAY

AUTHOR OF

TO SAVE HIMSELF, THE LAST OF THE DYNMOKES, ETC.



TORONTO

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THE KING'S REVENGE.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

THE HERMIT OF WARKWORTH.

It is no light matter to be born, as I was born, in the debatable land between two powerful nations. And of all such borders our Scottish border is perhaps the most turbulent, the most often swept by war and famine, decimated by murder, and ruined by rapine. It was in the very midst of such doings that the three first years of my life were passed, and that I ever escaped from them I owe to John Chester alone, who, when the lonely tower which sheltered my father, my mother, and myself, and a score or so of men-at-arms and archers, was burnt about our ears, bore me away.

My father was a poor knight, with nothing by way of patrimony, and only such slender means of living as a brave man may carve for himself with his sword. The story that I was told when I came to ask for myself the meaning of things generally and of being what I was, was that our family was good enough so

far as blood goes, and had once owned a considerable estate,—where, my informants could not or would not tell,—which had been lost in De Montfort's wars. Certain it is that my father was glad to take his young bride to the poor place which he occupied in virtue of his appointment by the Warden of the Eastern Marches (then Lord Percy, I believe), and there to live the life of a hermit, save only that no hermit takes such risks at the hands of wicked men, watching the peace of the border on behalf of King Edward the First of that name.

Alas! they were dreadful times for those who lived in the borderland, for Sir William Wallace, who afterwards paid the forfeit of a treason which many honest Englishmen deemed no treason at all, was carrying on fierce warfare with his nominal lord, our English king. The whole countryside was in a turmoil, the armed bands of soldiery, followers of Edward, or Scottish rebels (as he would have them termed), carried fire and the sword into Scotland and England in turn. One night a band of Scots set on our tower, and when dawn broke I was an orphan, father and mother both dead within the hours of darkness, my poor mother killed by a falling beam as she rushed with me in her arms from the burning house, and my father stricken to death defending the gate. His last action, so they tell me, was to fight his way into the open, and there, pressing his lips, already cold with death, on mine, he handed me to a young esquire, the John Chester aforesaid, and bade him ride into safety with me while he could. And for my sake John Chester, who was loath enough to leave him in such a plight, rode off into the darkness, and two days later

at sunset rode through the Bailiff-gate of Alnwick to the castle, where at the time Lord Percy was the guest of Antony Bek, Bishop of Durham, and where, by good fortune, I found a protector even greater than either of the two great lords I have named. For as it chanced, just at this time, Earl Thomas of Lancaster and other places, lately come by his father's death, Edmund Crouchback, brother of our king and himself a king (of Sicily) by favour of our father the pope, into possession of wide lands in the country of Northumberland, was there, and hearing of my father's death and my own evil plight, forthwith roundly swore that the son of so gallant a man, whom he had seen bear himself bravely in more than one stubborn fight, should lack for nothing he could give him, and he forthwith sent me to his own manor of Embleton, with orders that I should be served as if I were his kinsman, nay, his son.

That those to whom I was thus sent interpreted the charge somewhat more lightly than I since have thought proper was no fault of the earl's. I had to learn the lesson that the orphan is no man's child, and if I came by more cuffs than caresses in my childhood, I dare say it was only natural, and has done me no harm in the end. But it was a lonely life, with only men too old to bear arms, and a priest or two, and the tillers of the soil (poor husbandmen these last; content to wring from their mother earth but sufficient to keep them in corn for the winter), and Hugh the miller's son of Lesbury, a lad some four years older than myself, who was my constant companion and my aider and abettor in many a boyish escapade. No meet comrade this perhaps for a gently born knight's

son, but better than the old men among whom my lines were cast, and always to this day my staunch true friend in good or evil fortune.

The years of childhood rolled away as they will, leaving in that quiet spot no landmarks to distinguish one summer from another, or to single out one winter from its fellows. As I grew old enough I learned such things as they could teach me, the chaplain, Father Peter, a fat lazy old man who mumbled a mass for us once a week, undertaking to teach me letters first of all. A useful learning too it proved in after days, for though I was no clerk (as he would fain have made me) I could always read writing in a good light, and what is more, if no man hurried me, could put on paper what I listed with the best of them. But I was small credit to my teacher then, I fear, though when it was a case of learning how to use the bow, the rightful weapon of an Englishman, or swordplay with a tiny broadsword which the village armourer made for me out of an old Scottish broadsword that had somehow found its way to the manor, I was a scholar apt enough.

And so I come to the time when I was twelve years old, a well-grown lad, straight as an arrow, and brimming with rude health, and to a hot autumn day in September of the year of our Lord 1311, when Hugh was tending the flock of sheep which they were fattening for the winter's salting on the green down which crests the great rock beside the Rumbel Kern. A famous spot this Rumbel Kern is, well-known all along the Northumbrian coast, a great funnel may-be a yard or more in width, hollowed right up through fifty feet of solid rock to the cliff's top. Here, where the east

wind sends the sea beating furiously on our coasts, the water is driven with a mighty rush right up this strange outlet, and sends the foam spreading heavenwards across the downs with a deafening roar. But on that day it was quiet enough, and the sea scarce lapped the broad stretch of sand along the bay to the north, and even on the iron-bound rocks below the Rumbel Kern there was not enough swell to crest the oily waves with foam. The summer stayed late that year, and the days were long and hot in the old manor house, so after our breakfast, while the sun was scarce as yet a couple of spears' breadths high in the heaven, I gave Father Peter the slip, and taking with me my bow and sufficient arrows lest I should see wild game, and not forgetting a cake or two (for boys are ever hungry folk), I slipped away towards the sea, to where I knew I should find Hugh with his sheep. And so I found him, and while the flock fed hither and thither as they listed, nibbling their fill of the sweet short grass, Hugh and I lay full length on the cliff's top beside the Rumbel Kern, and spoke as we had often enough before spoken, of what we meant to do when we should be free to turn our backs on this corner of the land, and mix in the great world on which all our thoughts were set.

"Well a-day," sighed Hugh, looking savagely at his charges as they roamed across the down before his eyes. "It cannot now be long before I shall be able to join the earl's train. And if my father is still bent on making a miller of me, why——"

"Well, Hugh?" I asked.

"I shall take leave and go of my own accord, as that German told me he had done in his youth. I am

sure I shall soon be able to pass muster with the best of them."

I knew the man he meant—one of the foreign mercenaries who had been brought to England for the Scottish wars. I, too, had listened, and longed to do as Hugh said. But I passed that by, thinking only of the other part of his speech—that in which he spoke of his great bulk, for he was tall and stout for his age, looking far older than he really was. Secretly in my own heart, though I would have sooner died than confess it, I was jealous of Hugh's greater age and bulk, and it grieved me to think how easy it would be for him to do as he wished, while I——

"Hugh," I said presently, "I wish I could peep into the future, and see what lies in store for me, and you."

I added this last from politeness, for Hugh's concerns were, after all, more his than mine. But he took me to mean what I said.

"Whatever the future brings," he said carelessly, "it cannot be worse than the present, and, knowing this, I have never sought to learn. But if I did so wish——"

He broke off short and plucked a long blade of grass, and began to chew it thoughtfully. And I, knowing how much he understood—for Hugh was no ordinary country hind, but had had dealings with many strange folk—I, I say, was quick to put a question to him.

"What would you do, Hugh?" I asked.

"Well," he said, lowering his voice and looking round as carefully as if we had not been a mile out of earshot of any living soul, "I should go to the hermit

of Warkworth and ask him. They say he is skilled to read the future in the stars."

Now this hermit was a man shunned of his fellows, for some reason that I had never been able to learn. More than once I had heard it muttered that the secular law would not touch him, richly as he merited it, for fear of the Church, nor the Church for fear of the people, who accounted him a friend. So I asked what Hugh meant.

"Well," he replied, "there lies some mile or so above the castle at Warkworth, hard by the river's edge, an ancient hermitage hewed out of the solid rock. In this the hermit dwells, as they tell that his predecessors have dwelled there before him ever since the first. That was the knight who slew those he loved in error, and so retired to that lonely spot to expiate his sin."

"I never heard of him," said I.

"'Tis a sad enough tale," he said. "The story goes that some two hundred years ago a certain English knight was wounded in the wars, and while he lay helpless from his wounds the thieving Scots came roving down, just as they do to-day, and carried off the maiden whom he dearly loved and hoped to make his bride. Now the sick knight had a brother, and he on hearing of the misfortunes which had befallen his kinsman, without saying what he was going to do, set out to recover the lady from the Scots. Long did he travel, and far, but was successful in the end, and was hastening homeward with his prize when, as ill fate would have it, just as he drew near their home, he encountered his brother, who, being now recovered of his sickness and full of wrath at his loss, was

setting out on the same errand, all unwitting what his dear brother had done. In the darkness he recognized only the lady's voice, and thereupon mistaking her rescuer for her abductor, he set on him so fiercely that he dealt him a mortal wound before he had time to defend himself. But, alas! his misfortunes did not end here; for before his fury was spent the lady, who saw his mistake, threw herself between the brothers, receiving her own lover's sword-point in her gentle heart. And so this unhappy knight at one and the same time deprived of life the two beings whom he loved best in the world. They say that, unable to stifle his remorse, he returned to that lonely spot where with his own hands he hollowed out the chapel in which to say masses for their souls, and in the window you will find the poor lady's effigy, carved by his hands, and so placed that the light of sun or moon must fall upon the face."

"But the hermit, Hugh," I asked. "Is he so skilled in foretelling fortunes, as you say?"

Hugh laughed.

"Nay, I know nothing," he answered; "but if I wanted to find out I should try."

I sprang to my feet, glancing at the sun as I did so.

"And so will I," I cried. "How far is it?"

"Ten miles, at least, and the road a bad one."

"How does one go?"

He told me, and forthwith, having divided the cakes in my wallet, I tightened my belt, and, catching up my bow and arrows, prepared to depart; indeed, so eager was I to be gone, that I could scarce wait to hear the end of Hugh's directions.

I sped away down the hillside towards the south, only pausing once to wave my hand to Hugh, who, rising in his turn, watched me till the hollow hid us from each other's gaze. Then on I sped, passing first of all the tiny fishing village of Craster, inhabited by folk rude in speech and manner, whom at the time I rather feared, if I must confess it, but whom I came to understand better in after days. And then on I went across the downs, close beside the sea, and so into the wood which runs along the brook from Howick to the sea. Hugh's directions had told me to follow this till I came to the fallen trunk of a tree, by which I might cross the water to the further bank. A loathsome spot it was, dark from the trees overhead, and damp from the slimy grass underfoot, while in the pools the frogs croaked loudly, and ever and again a snake glided from the track on which it had been vainly courting the sun. But still my journeying even here was not without profit, for a fine fat hare jumped up before me, and in a trice an arrow made her mine. For I knew better than to approach the hermit empty handed. The Church, like most maidens, is ever better wooed with a gift in the hand. And so presently I found my tree-trunk, and, crossing, climbed the hillside into the light of day again, and on through Long Hoton to Lesbury, where was Hugh's father's mill, with the stream of the Alne merrily driving the great stones for him. This I knew of old, but I sped past for fear that any of those from the manor might be there—as, indeed, they often were—to stop me; and so gaining the track which led from Alnwick to Warkworth, I dropped behind a hedge and made my dinner, some-

what far into the day, for the way had been long and the road rough, and I late of starting, so that the declining sun warned me that the days in September are not dragged out as they are in June, and I were wise to get to the road again.

It took me nigh two hours, as I judged, before I crossed the bridge over the Coquet and entered Warkworth town. The warder on the gate which guards the bridge looked curiously at me, but said nothing—somewhat to my undoing, as it chanced, for I was on the wrong side of the stream. But this I only learned by asking of a man-at-arms whom I met under the castle walls beyond the town.

“The cell is near,” he answered, when I spoke to him, “but the road is far. The river lies between you and it, my boy; and even if it did not, it is hard to find the path in the darkness.”

“How far up the stream is it?” I asked. “And could I miss it?”

“As for distance, it is some half-mile from here, in the woods out yonder; and as for missing it, the good hermit ever keeps a light, if it be only a few sticks for a fire. There is no other dwelling there.”

I thanked him, and went on. And soon I saw in the darkness the tiny glimmer of the light which he had told me to watch for across the water.

But to get there, that was the puzzle; and I did not know if the stream were fordable or not. But water never frightened me yet; from a child I was as much at home in it as any duck, and, stripping off my clothes, I made them into a bundle with the hare, which had been plaguèy heavy that last mile or two, and plunging into the water, which was colder than I

cared for, waded or swam towards the light. And as I scrambled up the bank, dripping like any terrier after my swim, the hermit himself, who had heard the noise I made and marvelled what it might be, came down towards me bearing a flaming cresset of turf shoulder high. What he saw you know already, but by the red light which he threw across the water from where he stood, I saw a short stout man with a jolly red face, as little like what I had pictured a hermit as well might be.

"By'r Ladye," he cried, "it is a boy!"

And then he began to laugh.

"What brings you here?" he asked next.

"That I will tell you, holy father," I answered boldly, "when I am clothed again."

And shaking off the wet as well as I could, I was about to don my garments when he threw me a cloth with which to dry myself. This done, I undid my bundle, and, of course, out fell the hare.

"Ho, ho!" he said, frowning, "a poacher, I suppose, and red-handed. So it is sanctuary that you lack. If any of Lord Percy's men should catch you, you will be like to swing, for he is a mighty hunter."

I knew that Lord Percy held both this castle and that of Alnwick, in virtue of a grant from the bishop, but I served a greater than he. And I hastened to say so.

"I fear no Percy," I cried. "I have a more powerful lord to look to than him, one to whom he need not blush to bend the knee; and as for this hare, I shot it on my own land—that is, Lord Thomas's, where I am free to do as I please."

"Then what is it doing here?" he asked.

"It is for your reverence," I answered, bowing low.

He laughed, but took it, and then he put another question.

"When man or woman comes with full hands there is generally a something sought in return. What is it?"

"I fain would question your reverence regarding the future," I said.

This time he frowned.

"Out upon these silly folks who spread such tales," he cried. "And out on you for believing them. 'The future is in the hands of God, young sir, and it ill becomes His servant to pretend to tear aside the veil which He has woven for our comfort. If this is what brought you, you have come in vain.'"

"And you will tell me nothing?" I asked, fearing my hare was but a paltry gift.

"No; because I cannot."

"Then I need not stay," I said, my heart bursting with disappointment as I turned to go.

"Nay, nay," he said, plucking my sleeve, "you must stay here to-night or sleep in the woods. Come, I can give you supper and a corner to rest in, and in the daylight you can find your way home."

And I was fain to consent, and had little cause to regret my doing so. For if the fare was simple it was ample, which was all in all to a hungry boy. And as we ate, for the hermit was no laggard in this matter, he talked most kindly, giving me much advice on the folly of wishing to face the world, from which he had retired in disgust, before I were forced to. And when he said that, I was minded to hint that he might be worse off, but forbore.

An hour after sunset he bade me go to my couch, for he must to the chapel to pray for the souls of those of whom I had heard. And picking up the cresset again, he led me to some steps, at the head of which there was what looked like a dark hole in the rock. Through this, the entry to his cell, first he and then I passed.

CHAPTER II.

FATHER ANSELM'S PROMISE.

THE story goes that the strange place into which I was ushered by the hermit was fashioned by the hands of the original recluse ; but this I have ever found it difficult to believe. For though the inner cells (of which there are two) were rough enough, the carving in the outer chamber of the hermitage—that which they call the chapel—is too good to have been the work of any man who was not a skilled mason by trade. Two things in particular struck me—the roof and the figure of the poor lady of the legend, either of which needed a good workman to fashion as they were when I saw them first, and at my second coming to the hermitage, older and more versed in the beautiful buildings which are the glory of our England, my first impressions were only more fully confirmed.

This hermitage of Warkworth is, as Hugh had told me, cut in the solid rock where it overhangs the stream. I am told the new Lord Percy has built a dwelling for the hermit beside the steps which lead to the entrance, but it was not so in my day. The outer chamber was the chapel, with its altar at the eastern end, and on one side of the altar the effigy of the lady,

lying full length as it were on the window-sill. Opposite to this again there was a window cut in the wall which divided off the living or sleeping chamber, and by this, on the inner side, a seat fashioned, so they would have us believe, by the first hermit so that he might sit and watch the face of the woman he had loved. Through this chapel we passed forthwith into the inner chamber, and as we did so the hermit showed me yet another piece of sculpture above the inner door, a sort of shield on which were set forth, as on a knight's escutcheon, the emblems of the Passion of our Blessed Lord; in the first quarter the crown of thorns, in the second the nails, in the third the sponge, and though the fourth quarter was blank, the face of the shield bore a cross, and from this was fashioned also the spear-head.

Inside there was enough of comfort to satisfy most men. The hermit pointed out to me the rough recess in which the first founder of the cell had been wont to sleep, but he himself preferred a good bed of rushes on the floor, spread with skins, and in winter, doubtless, warm and snug enough. Evidently, too, he was accustomed to company, for such another bed lay ready, and on this he bade me rest; and I, nothing loath, threw myself down, and, having muttered a prayer or two, was soon fast asleep.

How long I slept I know not; but, tired as I was, I presently awoke, to find a flood of moonlight sweeping over the outer cell. Nor was this all, for in the doorway there was a hum of voices, the clear, shrill tones of an old man, the mellow voice of my friend the hermit, and the rough rasping of the hated Scottish tongue. I raised myself on my elbow to listen,

but the voices were too low for me to hear; and so, wondering who those were that came at this hour of the night, I presently fell back, and tried to sleep again.

But I was not to be undisturbed for long, for before my eyes were well closed the trio entered the cell, and came and stood beside my couch. I had not been far wrong in my surmises, for there were besides the hermit two others; the one a venerable monk, whose cowl was thrown back on his shoulders so as to display his snow-white hair and beard, and his pale, kind face and mild blue eyes, which age had so far hardly dimmed, and the other a short, squarely built fellow, clad from head to foot in armour as plain as any man-at-arms might wear, yet bearing himself with the easy assurance of one gently born, and wont to mix with court or camp. I thought at first that their coming into the cell was accidental, but I was speedily undeceived; for the Scot, speaking in the hard rasping tones I hated as only a lad can hate who had been orphaned by the man's fellows, nay, perhaps his very kinsmen, addressed himself to the monk in words which could not but refer to me.

"A handsome, well-grown lad, father," he said. "And doubtless you are right. Well, if you have the power you say, use it for my sake as well as for his own. I should be glad to think that time would make amends, and glad, too, to lend my help, if it were only a prayer to you to do what you might to aid in so good a work."

The old monk did not answer his question or request or whatever it was, for I could not very well understand it then, though its meaning became clear

enough in after years, but pointed towards the door.

"You were best on your road," he said; "and I see my brother here is ready to guide you. There is not so much of darkness left that you dare tarry. The first streak of dawn ought to find you out at sea."

"You are right," replied the other, dropping on his knee. "Your blessing, father, and I am ready to go."

The old monk laid his withered hands on the curly reddish brown hair, and, raising his eyes to heaven, asked a blessing on the kneeling man. Then the latter sprang to his feet, and without another glance at me was gone. A minute later I heard the splash of oars on the water below, and knew they were crossing the stream.

The old man stood listening, as I did, for a minute or two, and then he turned to me.

"Boy, are you awake?" he asked.

I answered that I was.

"What brought you here?" he inquired.

I told him that I had heard the hermit to be skilled in casting horoscopes, and telling the future by the stars, and learned in other lore as well. I said that I was a knight's son, with no one to help me to make my way in the world, and that I wished to know the future, if indeed it were possible to learn it at all. And as I spoke, I noticed that he did not pretend, as the hermit had done, to be shocked at my heathenish fancies, nor did he seem disposed to chide; but he turned on me a look of benevolence, in which pity, too, was mixed, as he began to answer my explanation.

"Boy," he said, so gravely that his words seemed to carry double weight, "you are seeking that which others are too glad to leave. Happier, far happier, were it for you if you could spend your days as you are doing now, away from the stress and storm which marks each man's course, be he great or be he little, through the world you long to see. Better yet were you advised to seek out some peaceful cloister, and there spend your days in the service of your God."

"Your pardon, father," I answered, "but by your leave I will not quit so early a world I have yet to see."

"Perhaps you are right," he answered, seemingly not the least displeased at the boldness of my answering so reverend a man. "To understand the consolations which religion offers, it behoves a man to know something of the secular life he would forsake. But remember this all through the life that lies before you, that to those who are world-weary, or unhappy, or unfortunate in their dealings with men, the Church offers a safe and peaceful haven, and a nearer communion with your God. But enough of this for the time. You wish to see the great world. Now, tell me, what does Aubrey Mauleverer expect to find there?"

It seemed to me a strange and disturbing thing that he should know my name.

"Who told you who I was?" I stammered.

"It were not very hard to guess," he answered, with a quiet smile, for he saw how astonished I was. "You yourself told my brother Fulgentius" (for such was the hermit's name) "that you were of the household of Thomas of Lancaster, and I knew at once who

you must be. Nay, do not look so puzzled, for the thing is simple enough. I knew your father, ay, and his father too, in the old days, and I was at Alnwick when that esquire, whose name I cannot recall at this moment, brought you in from the massacre at Wilrington."

The chance was one that might never return, and I snatched at it at once.

"Then, if you knew my father, and my grandsire," I cried, "tell me who I am."

To my great disappointment he only shook his head.

"This is no time to rake up stories that are more than half forgotten," he said. "It is enough for you that your father was an honest knight, and that your blood is gentle. I have no time to speak much to you, but I am going to do for you what you want, to tell you a little of the future, so far as I can see it."

So far I had been reclining on my elbow, but as he said this I jumped to my feet.

"Nay, nay," he said gently, "be not so excited. I am no seer to tear aside the veil with which a kind Providence cloaks our future, lest knowing what lies before us we should turn faint-hearted and die. But I see one thing clearly, and that is that ere many weeks are past you shall have your wish, and pass into the regions of court and camp, and mix with men and women, and learn how little of trust there is in either, and—but what am I saying? He is but a child. There, boy, enough for this night. To-morrow go to your present home, and make the most of it ere you are called upon to face the troubles and disappoint-

ments which lie in the path of every mortal. Now lie down again, and go to sleep."

He passed slowly into the outer cell, and left me to myself. But how was I to sleep with such news fresh on my brain? I was to go to the great world, to see kings, and earls, and knights, and fair ladies, and tournaments, and pageants, and mayhap real war. Sleep? I could not have slept if my life hung on it. And for an hour or more I lay there picturing to myself the great world as I imagined it, full of brightness and happiness and of success for me—a world, I need not say, as unlike the reality I came shortly to know as anything well could be. And then presently, my mood changing, I rose and crept slowly into the chapel, meaning I hardly know what.

The moonlight was so strong, that it seemed almost as if the little chapel was as light as day. I could see the whole place as clearly as possible, and that before the altar there knelt in prayer the tall figure of the monk. He made no sign of knowing that I was there, and I, feeling that I could not get a better example, dropped on my knees in my turn to pray to Him who watches over the meanest of His creatures for aid and help when the time should come for me to go forth into the world as the monk had said. And so for an hour or more we remained, the chapel as silent as the tomb, the monk bowed before the altar, and the moonlight shining bright on the fair face of the effigy of the poor lady of the story. And though I tried hard to fix my attention to my orisons, ever and again my thoughts would wander to worldly matters, and I would fall a-wondering whether my young life, too, would be cut short by misadventure, as hers and her lover's brother's had

been. It seemed to my untutored mind so hard that even right-doing and a chivalrous devotion to others should bring a man to so sudden a death. At length my midnight vigil came to an end, for being heavy with sleep I slipped back to my couch, and was soon locked in slumber.

When a hand on my shoulder woke me it was daylight; that is to say, the grey light of dawn was streaming into the outer cell.

"Rise," said the sweetly modulated voice of the monk. "It is the hour of matins. Come."

And once again I went back to the chapel, and followed with what devotion I could the holy words as the old man chanted the mass before the altar. Then he confessed and shrived me, and then bade me follow him as he stepped from the cell.

Hard by the shore of the river, the hermit was busily engaged broiling some freshly caught trout on a small fire. As soon as they were cooked to his satisfaction he set them, and some cakes, before us, his two guests. For my own part I was full hungry in the morning air, and did ample justice to the fare provided, as did he. But the old monk ate but sparingly, and, as it struck me, seemed impatient to be gone.

The day was but an hour old when we set out, he and I together. To him the road, which I should have found it hard to follow unaided, seemed to be quite familiar, and he led me straight to the high-road by which I had come on the previous day, and thence towards my home. For he, too, had business in that direction, so he said.

By the way he asked me many questions about myself, and gave me much sage advice regarding my con-

duct in the great world, of my speedy entry into which he seemed to entertain no doubt. Indeed, so well accepted had it become between us, that when we parted—as we did near the mill at Lesbury—I had fully made up my mind that what he promised would happen full soon.

It was past the noontide when I reached the house, and the dinner was finished, and Father Peter (as was his wont) fast asleep on a settle beside the great fireplace, in which, winter or summer, they kept a fire burning lest the hall should grow damp and cold. Seeing this, I begged some food of the cook, and, taking it with me, sped as fast as I could out to the down beside the Rumbel Kern, knowing that there I should find my friend Hugh the miller's son, of whom I had questions to ask.

Hugh was there, as I had hoped he would be, and once again we stretched ourselves beside the cliff overhanging the sea, and I told Hugh all that had chanced since the previous day. And when I had finished I had a question or two to ask.

“Hugh,” I said, “you know many things. Who were those two—this monk and the Scot his companion?”

Hugh thought a moment.

“The monk I can easily guess,” he said presently; “and what the Scot is I can hazard as well. He is just one of those wandering soldiers who, of every degree, are spread over both sides of the border ever since King Edward declared that the two countries were one, and who pretend to be sympathizers with each man whom they chance to come across. Some are mere spies, sent to test the feelings of the

North; some are on the look-out for employment in the wars, and some are born intriguers, men who, at the imminent risk of hanging, wander to and fro, stirring up mischief in minds that would never dream of it without their aid."

"But the monk, Hugh?" I repeated. "What of the monk?"

"That is a certainty," he answered carelessly. "It was Father Anselm, I do not doubt. No other would answer the description as well."

"And who is Father Anselm?" I asked.

"A man who knows more and stands in more men's confidence than the rest of the shaven crew put together. Who or what he was before he became a Churchman I know not, though I have heard many guesses hazarded, each one making more of his past than did the other. Anyway, as a penance (so they say) for some fault of his youth, he took the cowl, and, being unable to altogether shake off the habits of his earlier years, he wanders from place to place, learning that which is happening and assisting those in difficulty with his advice."

"And what of this prophecy of his?" I said.

"What prophecy? I never heard he laid claim to know the future as he does the past."

"Did I not tell you he has said that shortly I shall go into the world I so dearly long to see?"

"Ah," said Hugh, with a quiet smile lurking about the corners of his mouth, "if the good father prophesied that, you may be sure that it will come true! There are those who are careful to prophesy only that which they know that they can perform."

I should have liked to ask him more, but he would

not linger longer in that spot. He said that he must be gathering his flock, for he had to take them home that night; and, without saying more, he rose and whistled to his dogs to get the sheep together at once.

Nor would he ever again revert to the subject of that trip of mine, or to my efforts to fathom the future. The matter seemed distasteful to him—why I could not guess at the time.

That did not stop me hurrying on such preparations as I had to make, slender enough in their way, it is true, but yet such as one has to do when leaving for the first time the home of his youth. Of course I did not dare to tell Father Peter or the steward what I expected to be coming, for, had I told the whole truth of that escapade of mine, it might have gone hard with me in the matter of short commons and of other penances, such as I never did love. But there were other little matters I could attend to—rounding off old duties and connections, and refusing fresh ones, and in these I sought distraction in that weary time.

None the less, my impatience grew mightily when the autumn turned to winter, and the year drew to its close, and yet another season opened, and there was no sign of my hopes being fulfilled. I thought I was forgotten—for somehow I had come to take the same view of the monk's promise as Hugh did, and believed that he was prophesying that which he meant to perform. I say I had begun to imagine myself forgotten, when I learned that I was wrong. For one dark January evening there came pricking to the manor a black-browed man-at-arms, bearing with him letters from no less a person than the good earl himself, in which, with other matters, it was written that

I was to be sent to the Castle of Pontefract (where Lancaster then was) by the bearer's hands.

Father Peter affected great sorrow at my going, and said he marvelled I showed so little affliction or surprise. But he did not know that I had been awaiting this summons for a good six months past (so it seemed to be).

But though all those among whom I had passed my childhood affected a sorrow at my going, there was one who was both sad and moved on my account and on his own. It was late on the evening before we started (for the man-at-arms was eager to get back, and stayed but one clear day to rest his weary horse) that Hugh sought me out and found me alone.

"I marvel," said he, "who this messenger may be. True, the earl has wide possessions, and draws his following from many lands; but it is strange that Dickon the groom, who was at Pontefract not two months since, declares that no such man was with the garrison when he left, and that when he charged the fellow with it, this Armstrong, as he calls himself, explained that he was but lately come from Wales. Now, there is nought of the Welshman about him."

"Perhaps his tale is true," I replied.

"And equally, perhaps, it is not," answered Hugh, shaking his head. "Anyway, I trust you will be careful, lest it should be some snare to——"

"To what, Hugh?" I asked.

"To lure you away."

"And who would do that?" I said. "I have not an enemy in the world."

"Who knows?" he replied gravely. "Our Ladye grant that you have not. But be that as it may, I

wish I were going with you, for your sake and my own."

"I' faith," said I, "I too wish you were. But let us hope it may not be long before you chance on the same road."

CHAPTER III.

WHAT CHANCED UPON THE ROAD.

As I lay awake that night, being unable to sleep from excitement, Hugh's warning was very often in my mind, and I determined that I would look to it that I came by no harm on the road. For if I must confess it, this man-at-arms, who was to be my travelling companion, had none of my liking, seeing that, as far as looks went, I had never met one worse-favoured in all my life. And though in my life I have known ill-favoured men and women too, whose hearts have been as good as their faces were unpleasing, yet it has been my rule, founded perhaps on this first experience, that when I found a man both ugly and sour of face and expression, I have forthwith put myself upon my guard, as Hugh's advice put me that day. To me, who till that time had seen so little that even a ride into Alnwick on a feast day with Father Peter to a Mass at the Abbey of our Ladye or to a fair was a great event, everything I saw was full of wonder, and I think that in any other company I should have enjoyed the journey southward. Our road was first to Alnwick, where we lay that night, and thence to Morpeth, to Newcastle on the Tyne, to Durham and to

Darlington, and so to North Allerton and Borough-bridge, where the first great event of my life took place.

Now this journey of ours, which in summer or in dry weather should have been accomplished well within the space of fifteen days or so, halting of Sundays and not unduly pressing our good beasts, was nearly twice as long. It was the depth of winter, and the snow lay thick and heavy in the drifts, so that even the great North Road along which lay our way was well-nigh impassable at times. My guardian, the surly John Armstrong, affected to be wondrous careful of our cattle, and declared that he had the earl's own orders that he was to spare both man and beast. This was all the answer I could get to my remonstrances, when I urged that half a dozen miles a day was poor travelling at best, and when I pressed the point more hardly, urging that at this speed it would be midsummer ere we reached our destination, he told me grimly that I would find it fast enough before I was done. And little did I reckon of what he meant by that.

As we fared further on our way I began to think that Alnwick, which till that time had seemed so fine a place, was but a poor little town after all, when compared with the greater cities that I saw. Especially did Newcastle seem to me a place of import, with its busy people, who seemed so different from the slower northerners with whom I had always lived. These last had been to me enough so far, but now I was to find that I had learnt little in my life, for every new place I came to taught me something, and seemed at the same time a promise of yet more to come. But of all

the places that I came to Durham interested me most, not only from the church in which rest the bones of the blessed Cuthbert, our own Northumbrian saint, but the great castle and the other famous buildings, all tokens of the greatness of the city, whose bishop ranks as a prince. I had always thought that Alnwick Castle was a wonderful place, and had marvelled how any churchman could be so wealthy that he could afford to bestow it on another man; but now, when I learned how within the strong walls of yet another fenced city the bishop could rest in peace beyond the reach of the rieving Scots at the very home of his See, I no longer wondered that he had deemed Alnwick and his castle charges best left to more warlike hands, though of a truth some of these northern bishops have been known to exchange the mitre for a helmet, and bear themselves like men in the very forefront of the fight.

As I have said, my escort dawdled by the way until my boyish impatience almost led me to rebel against such waste of time. But (as the fellow had himself told me) I learnt full soon enough the cause of all this seemingly pointless loitering over a journey which was hard enough without prolonging it. When we had crossed the river Tees, and were in what men call the broad-acred shire of York, we presently came to North Allerton, and there more than ever before did my companion become morose. I had never liked the man myself, and somehow the way he kept looking at me made me careful of myself, so much so that when he proposed at this very place that instead of lying by night in the common hall of the inn, as was our wont, we should retire to a smaller outhouse where we would be alone, I pretended I loved the warmth of mine host's

fire too well to quit it without good reason, and refused to budge. On this he cast at me an evil glance, and said I could have my way for the time.

So on the next morning, in place of waiting for the rest of the company at the inn, and travelling as a prudent man does in good strength, through a wild country infested with footpads and other lawless men, he must needs set off at break of day, he and I alone, before the others were stirring. And this more than ever put me on my guard, as proved fortunate for me in the event.

Now it so chanced on this day, as we were riding out of this town of North Allerton, my pony cast a shoe. I was ever obstinate, and when he would have made light of it and pressed on, I chose to be wilful for once, and said that of two things he could take his choice, for I was not going to have my poor beast lamed because he chose for this time to pretend that we must travel post. Either, I said, he could stop and have another shoe fitted at the smith's, or else we should ride with care, picking the best of the track, and saving my pony's unguarded foot. So when he saw that I meant what I said he, after a moment's thought, chose the latter and bade me lead on.

Now when we had been riding the space of an hour or more, to my surprise he turned off the road and took a track to the westward. Fearing some treachery, I drew rein, and asked him what was in his mind.

He answered, not looking at me, that the bridge ahead was broken, and that we must turn aside to get the other road. Whereat I loosened my small dagger (all the arms I bore) in its sheath, and bade him proceed.

This last two days the hotter sun had been melting the snow, and the roads were slushy and the rivers in full flood. It was not long before we came to a nasty place, a crossing of a stream of that treacherous sort that one day is shallow and easy, and the next will drown both man and horse. This day the water was rushing swiftly, and my eye told me there was danger; but when I said as much to my companion, he only laughed.

"It may seem a great thing to a lad like you, who has seen so little," he said; "but for my part I and my good horse have crossed streams far deeper and a dozen times as wide. So go you first and lead the way."

For the first time it dawned upon me that he had it in his mind to drown me then and there. I looked at the steep bank before me on the further side, and cast another glance over my shoulder, though I knew that there was no help there. I was alone with this ruffian to do with as he listed. One hope I caught at, as a man will at such times. If I were to drown, the fellow should stand his chance with me, and I proposed as much.

"Nay," I said quickly, "but that were folly, indeed. Let us ride into it side by side; you up the stream to stem its force with your great horse that is so learned in such matters, as my poor pony is not."

"So be it," he answered; and catching at my pony's bridle, he led us down into the stream.

Now it had been in my mind to swim my pony away from him the instant we were in the water, and this action of his had forestalled that last chance, as

I thought. But it had this advantage for me—that he holding my bridle my hands were loose to do with as I willed, and in a trice I had my dagger free. Into the water we went, and when about mid-stream, when horses and riders should have been doing their utmost for themselves, he suddenly stretched over and caught me by the collar, as he did so exposing his left side where his armour joined.

“Let go!” I cried, guessing he meant to cast me into the stream to drown. He laughed for answer, hoisting me from my saddle all the while, yet at the same time slipping over more than was safe for himself. Then, knowing one of us must die that moment, I hesitated no longer, but buried my dagger in his heart. I felt a sickening feeling as he gave a great scream, and, throwing up his hands, fell headlong into the stream; and, as he did so, I, too, loosened from my saddle already, lost my balance and fell, and in a moment was being whirled down the seething waters, and near as helpless as he was. I have said I loved the water, but I did not mean under conditions such as these, for this was melted snow, and swirling as I had never known water swirl before, and as I rose to the surface I gave a great despairing cry, believing my last hour had come. It was well I did so, for of myself I had never scaled that slippery bank. But help was nearer at hand than I had thought, and as with a few strong strokes I went towards the bank, some one cried to me to hold on a minute, and they would have me out. And sure enough in a minute or so by time, though it seemed a lifetime to me, I was hauled on to the bank, where I found half a dozen stout men-at-arms, under a grim

esquire, all of whom cast on me questioning looks of no friendly, kindly sort.

"How now, you devil's imp!" cried the leader of the party. "Who are you, and what made you knife the man?"

"I knifed him," I answered, shivering with the cold, "because he was minded to drown me. And as for my name, it is Aubrey de Mauleverer, and a better one than yours I warrant."

And then for answer the giant (for such he was) gripped me with both his great hands, and stared at me as though he had seen a ghost.

"Aubrey Mauleverer!" he cried. "Yes, it might be so—the lad would be about his age by now. But what make you here? and why should yonder jack-man want to slay you?"

"For your last question you must seek an answer from himself," I answered, pointing to where a couple of his men were hauling my enemy ashore; "for your first, know that I come from Earl Thomas's manor of Embleton, and am making my way to Pontefract to join my lord."

He looked more puzzled than ever. Then he called to his fellows to bring John Armstrong to him. But the answer well nigh made me burst into tears to think what I had done.

"Nay, it were best to throw him back," they answered. "The man is dead as mutton. A neater stab was never seen."

The giant scratched his head. Then he be-thought him of one of his following who might perchance throw light on this matter, which was so far obscure.

"Come here, John Borlock!" he cried. "You know the earl's people. Was yonder carrion one of them?"

I waited breathless while the man went and looked.

"Not to my knowledge," he said. And at this answer the stranger looked more puzzled than ever.

"Well, Master Aubrey," he said, not unkindly, "mayhap you are telling me the truth. Anyway, as I am riding to Pontefract myself, you shall go with me, and let the earl settle for himself whether he cares for his pages using their daggers on his jackmen in this fashion."

My pony had been caught, and I soon mounted, and we started homeward again, for it would seem that they were for North Allerton themselves. And when I learned this, I asked the esquire whether he knew that the bridge was broken, whereat he laughed grimly, and said that the bridge was truly broken, but on the road that he had just left. The North Road bridge was sound enough and this it was that brought him on that cross-road to my benefit that day. But after a bit, when we had gone some way, he suddenly turned to me, and asked a question.

"Lad, in that manor yonder, did they ever tell you of one John Chester, a——?"

But I cut him short at once.

"Are you John Chester?" I asked. "My second father—the man who carried me away to safety when my poor father lay stricken to death by the false Scots?"

I could see a flush mount to his bronzed face as he answered heartily—

“Ay, ’tis my little lad, and well grown, too. Well met, Master Aubrey, and methinks just in the nick of time. Yes, I am John Chester, and glad I am this day to find you keep a corner warm in your heart, for the man who was your playfellow years ago.”

And so we fell to talking, riding out of earshot of the rest; and John must needs ask questions and hear all I had to tell, and how I had fared these last ten years, and so on. And before we rode into the inn-yard at North Allerton we were the best of friends, as indeed we have been ever since.

He cautioned his troop that they should say naught of what had chanced by the brook, and to me he added words of good advice.

“Why that dead caitiff should have wished to end you there is more than I can tell you,” he said; “nor can I even hazard so much as a guess. Perchance we shall be able to learn at Pontefract; but this much I tell you, this is none of Earl Thomas’s gear. Mean-time, keep a silent tongue; and if any ask you why you return thus, say that your jackman has gone to Middleham, and that you ride with us.”

I own the change was for me a pleasing one, for John was a better companion for me than Armstrong had been. We lay that night at North Allerton again, and the next morning rode out in good time, meaning to lie at Boroughbridge that night. For these new friends of mine, being set on business, made light of twenty miles that day, and the coming of evening found me—somewhat weary, I own—at the sign of the Three Falcons at that city, a place I was to see more of in after years.

It seemed as though, if the beginning of this journey had been uneventful, the ending was to be too weighty in mischances for poor me. For in the inn that night there chanced that which—though it angered John Chester not a little—was fated to exercise a great influence on all my after life.

We had finished our own supper, we two, and were seated in the inglenook, as befitted our rank, while the men-at-arms were gathered around us, when presently there came a great hammering on the door; and when the host had gone to open it, there walked in three knights, followed by half a dozen serving-men. He who walked first was closely muffled in his hood, and when he threw it back I thought John Chester had been stricken with a sickness, so white did he become. But the stranger took no notice, seating himself at the table, and, though he ate but sparingly, calling for more than one flagon of wine. And then, when he had satisfied his appetite, he threw off his cloak, and, walking to the fireplace, drew a stool to the heat, and sat down among us, asking that no man should shift his place for him. And then it was that I saw his broad gold belt, the sign visible of his rank of earl. But his dress was to me as nothing to his face, which was so handsome and so winning that on the instant I fell to liking him as I—ay, let me confess it—as I like him to this day.

A page may be an earl himself some day, and so, no doubt, he thought, for out of all that company it was me he singled out to talk to, calling me to his side at once.

“Come hither, my pretty page, and tell me who you are and what make you here.”

But I was either mindful of John Chester's caution or of myself growing heedful of what I said.

"I am travelling even as you are, lord earl," I answered, "and more I need not say, seeing that in these times a traveller's concerns are best his own and no one else's, as doubtless your worship will admit yourself."

And as I spoke I heard a grunt of satisfaction rise from the corner into which John had drawn himself, and so knew I had done right. Nor was the stranger earl offended, for he laughed as he answered—

"You may live to be a great man yet, sir page," he said, "if you can so readily veil your thoughts in civil words, and turn a question that you do not wish to answer. But you are right. For this evening let us forget that we are anything but fellow-travellers, cast together by a fortunate chance, and so strive to make for us that greatest blessing of poor man—the happy moments which so seldom come."

He spoke with so melancholy an air that my heart went out to him more than ever. And I drew nearer to him, and, casting myself on the rushes beside his feet, I lay there looking up at his face. And I think the action pleased him, for, calling for a guitar, he began to sing little French *chansons* such as I had never heard before, accompanying himself the while. And when he had finished he asked me whether I, too, did not possess an accomplishment which no true knight need be ashamed to own to.

"It is your turn now, sir page," he said, offering me the guitar. "Come, I will warrant that you can put my poor efforts in the shade, for the day is not

far distant when one so well favoured will be serenading the bower of lady fair."

"I cannot play as you do," I answered; "and my songs are but ballads at best. But what I can do I will; and if it please you to hear one of our northern ballads, I will venture one for the honour of my home."

He nodded, and I sang to him such a ballad as here in the rough north our country folks sing round the fireside of a night—one of those fierce lays which tell of border forays, and which so truly portray the life we lead. At court, in after days, they were wont to jeer at them, saying they were rough as our moss troopers themselves. But I have ever loved them, telling, as they do, of my loved northern home. I had a sweet enough voice in those days, and I think it pleased him, for he said kindly as I finished—

"I see I was not mistaken. Thank you, young sir. Whoever you are, and wherever you were brought up, I will go warrant that it is gentle—nay, noble blood which flows in your veins."

And this remark pleased me, perhaps because it flattered my own secret hopes. Anyway, of all the evenings that I remember, none, even at this lapse of years, stands out so plainly in my memory, or seems to me a more perfect type of what such a gathering should be. No rioting or drunkenness or brawling, as is too often the custom of these inns, and that it was so I have ever laid to the influence of the courtly gentleman whom I met that night for the first time.

Only John Chester was in the sulks. Yes, even after they brought in the beds, he refused to seem to know me or to look my way. The night before he

and I had shared a couch, and I had slept soundly under his mighty cloak, but this night I lay cold as when John Armstrong was my sole companion. Nor could I guess the cause.

And it was just the same next morning, when we were stirring early—so early, in fact, that the sun only began to show as we mounted. And I heard John Chester answer to the host, who remarked that to Pontefract was a long ride—

“And were it twice as far I need ride it, knowing what I do.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEWS AT PONTEFRACT.

It was a bitterly cold morning as we rode out of Boroughbridge. The frost was come again, making the roads as hard as iron, which was in our favour, seeing we had so far to go, if only the men-at-arms could keep their great horses from tripping. But if the day was cold, surely John Chester's humour was far colder, for not one word would he say to me. At last I could bear it no longer, and pressing my pony alongside of his great destrier I asked flatly what was my sin.

"You are bnt an unnatural boy," he growled, "seeing that you cotton thus to your country's foes."

"My country's foes!" I exclaimed aghast. "And how so, pray?"

"Boy, that was Gaveston."

And so I knew the full extent of my sin. For though I had lived so retired and seeing so few, there was no corner of England in those days where the name of King Edward's favourite was not known—ay, and cursed as only a nation can curse that hates.

"Gaveston?" I gasped. "And why did no one tell me?"

John Chester laughed grimly.

"Because they knew not. In that assemblage I alone knew the truth, and so I withdrew into my corner lest he should guess I knew him, or see me—for let me tell you, boy, that at court there are few that do not know De Valence's favourite esquire—and so should hold his secret in my hand. He thought that here in the north he was safe, that no man would recognize him, and that he could creep to his master's side unknown. But I knew him, and ere the sun sets this night, if Saint George and Saint Michael favour me, the Lords Ordainers shall know that the fox is loose again."

For a space we were silent, and then I spoke.

"John," said I, "surely you will forgive me, seeing how I was ignorant and saw but a courtly gentleman who was kind and friendly to me, who have not known too much of such kindness in my life?"

The plea went to his heart, and he turned on me his honest face, as full of love and kindness as he had shown me when he first learnt who I was.

"Yes, I forgive you freely, boy," he said, "and the more readily that you were so circumspect in your telling of who you were." Here he laughed quite as his wont was. "And, after all, I have been hasty to condemn you, for by my father's head he is all you thought him—ay, kindly and courtly too, as I John Chester will maintain among my peers. But none the less he is your enemy—the enemy of every honest Englishman, and as such it is your duty to hate him as you hate Beelzebub himself."

I thought to myself that, try as I might, I could not quite do that, but prudence held me silent for a

space. Then, finding that John was in good humour again, I thought I would try and learn more of this Gaveston, or Earl of Cornwall as he was now, than I had heard as yet. And as it chanced, good John, a little ashamed that he had been so hasty with my ignorance, was willing to tell me most of what he knew. And in truth it was a strange tale that he had to unfold. For surely never yet was there a man so complex as this very earl.

“This Gaveston came among us first,” said John, “in the late king’s time. Not that he found much favour in those days with any save with his present Grace. The first Edward was a stern soldier who loved not the fripperies with which this foreigner has enslaved his Grace’s mind, and seeing clearly what was like to happen, he must needs banish him from the realm, nor did he dare to return while the old king lived. But when the great monarch breathed his last at Burgh-on-the-Sands, hard by Carlisle, the first act of our liege was to send for his favourite home again. Men say that with his dying breath the old king laid on his son this double charge: never to cease from the Scottish wars till he had made that kingdom his own, and not to have Gaveston back—both of which things his Grace has sadly cast aside. Well, lad, this Gaveston came, and by my life I can not tell you which it was angered our English nobles most, the man’s address or his bitter tongue. It was at the tournament of Wallingford, if I recollect right, some four years since, that he brought things to a head, for not content with overthrowing all our native English lords and knights in the lists, which was fair enough, he must needs go dub them with nicknames

for the mirth of the idle court. Then it was that he called my lord Pembroke a Jew, saying Sir Joseph Judas were his fittest name. Lancaster he dubbed an actor or buffoon, and Warwick a wild boar, and so on. From that day, as I believe, they have never ceased to compass his death. Twice have they caused him to be banished, and twice has he returned, and by my faith when this night I shall tell them he is here again, it will go hard with them if he and his false master do not rue it to their death."

"But, John," said I, with a boy's persistency, "in all you tell me, where lies the cause for such a hatred as not only the nobles but the Commons bear to this most accomplished knight?"

"Accomplished he is," replied my friend. "That no man may deny. But give me a heart equal to head and hands. Listen, boy. The two best men that I have ever known, his Grace's father and the old Earl of Lincoln, Henry de Lacey, both hated and feared this man, and that is warranty enough for me. His glamour is on you at this time, as it is ever on the king's Grace, but cast it off, nay, pray to our Ladye to shield you from this as from every other sort of ill."

It was strange to me *then*, as it has often been since, how deep-rooted in the minds of all my countrymen was this hatred of one who was to my own knowledge a courtly gentleman. And, young as I was, I dared not press John further, for I saw the mere talking of the man he hated was like to bring him to a most unseemly rage, and so I turned aside the subject, and asked a question or two regarding this Castle of Pontefract, to which we were bound.

"That, lad," he said, "is a place of such strength that it needs to be seen to be understood. There is not in England, not even the Tower of London itself, a stronger place, or one which has been better cared for by its various lords. It was a fortunate day for your Earl Thomas when it fell to his hands, for its possession gives him such a strength here in the north as makes him for most purposes the equal of the king himself."

"And whose was it?" I asked; "and how came it to fall into his hands?"

"From the first coming of the Normans it has been the De Laceys," John answered. "It was begun by Ilbert de Lacey, when the first William was (as he termed it) putting the land in chains of stone, and every one of them since that day had added something to it, so that when Earl Henry, the greatest captain of his age, save only the king, had the handling of it, there was little left to do. But his skill has made it the strongest place in England to-day."

"Then how came Earl Thomas to take it?" I asked.

"Take it? He never took it. It was well for him that he was not set the task, for it is no such easy thing as you might think. For not only is it a place of wondrous strength, but with it go broad lands, stretching from sea to sea, and at the first sign of danger to their feudal lord, full half Yorkshire and Lancashire, and Heaven knows how many besides, come pricking to his aid. The man is not living that can take Pontefract Castle in fair fight."

In after days it came to me to recall these words, and to think how had but my master owned the spirit

of his forebears—but let that rest till it finds its proper place.

“Then how came it to him, John?” I asked.

“In right of his wife, the Lady Alice, Earl Henry’s only surviving child,” was his answer. “He had two sons, but both died when children, and so ends the famous line with a woman, good only to bring her acres to another man’s house.”

It struck me at the time that he spoke scornfully of this great lady, but I was more interested to learn of those two boys, who died, as he told me, when children. I asked him how it chanced.

“’Tis a sad story,” he replied; “the elder fell from the walls of the keep at Pontefract, and so died, and the younger was drowned while staying at some manor of his father’s in Wales. Both were mere boys.”

Much more he told me of this castle, and of the great family that had owned it, which sooth to say I have long since forgotten. And, moreover, as the sun rose stronger, melting the surface of the ground, I was full put to it to keep my pony on his legs. And so the day wore on, and though we made good headway, halting only at a roadside inn on the further side of Weatherby to bait our horses and refresh ourselves, the sun was getting low when we rode through Ferrybridge, and entered (so John told me) on the last stage of our journey. And then as the shades of night began to fall he pushed on, and within a short space of sunset turned off the highway, and rode up the lane towards the castle, of which so far we had seen but little.

And then for the first time did I realize something of what John had told me, as I saw towering a good

hundred feet above us the massive keep, flanked by the great gateways, and the outworks, and barbican, and moat, and with the tall walls of the inner bailey stretching away to our right. To me, who had but seen such puny places as Warkworth or Alnwick now seemed, this was verily a place of prodigious strength, and I no longer doubted that what my companion had said was true, and that with four great counties ready to arm for its defence, neither subject nor king himself could hope to beat the lord of such a stronghold to his knee. And as I looked I shuddered, for there was present in my mind at that moment the thought of the poor boy, perchance of my own age, who had fallen from that dreadful place, and so ended a life of such moment to his family and his country as well. For the ending of the De Laceys, the blotting out of the brave and prudent race, has ever seemed to me a misfortune to us all; and none the less a misfortune viewed in the light of what afterwards befell.

We of the Scottish border pride ourselves on keeping good guard, but I was astonished to see with what care this jewel was guarded from a chance of attack. Four gateways led us to the courtyard, and to two were drawbridges, and on each a guard, and such questioning as never yet was heard. But all men seemed to know my companion, and to bid him welcome right heartily, and none more so than the grey-haired seneschal, Sir Adam Swillington, who, as he accepted John's salute, remarked—

“Welcome to Pontefract, good John. Your lord, the noble Pembroke, has been eager in inquiry for you these three days and more.”

“I am no laggard, Sir Knight,” replied John

Chester; "but the roads are heavy, and we have been delayed beyond our expectation."

"Well, to the hall with you," replied the other.

"Nay, Sir Seneschal, but let me remove the marks of travel from my dress before my audience," urged John.

The other shook his head.

"My orders," quoth he, "bid me bring you to the earls, whether you come by day or night."

John swung himself stiffly from his saddle, and bade me do the same.

"Since we are to have audience," quoth he, "do you come, too."

And so we followed the seneschal across the courtyard to the great hall, which at this time was thronged with knights and esquires, and those of Earl Thomas's household, who had but then finished the evening meal. But of the commoner sort I took no heed, fixing my eyes on the dais, where were gathered together at that time the flower of England's nobility, tasting, so they said, of royal Lancaster's hospitality, really (as I came to know afterwards) consulting measures to coerce their king. In the centre was the host, distinguished from his fellows by his great size and his haughty bearing, and on his right was seated another prince of the royal house, nearer even than he was himself, Clare, Earl of Gloucester, the husband of the eldest sister of the king. On his left sat Aylmer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, since the great Earl of Lincoln's death, at once the most polished and the most prudent of the English barons, and next to him again, Humphry de Bohun, Earl of Hereford, and Constable of England, the host's lifelong friend.

There, too, were the savage Earl of Warwick, the Earl of Arundel, Sir Roger de Clifford, Lord Percy of Alnwick (the only one I knew then of them all), Warren de Lisle, John de Mowbray, William de Touchet, and many others, numbering in fact among them most of the twenty-one Lords Ordainers, chosen to govern the king, and the flower of the supporters of what was the popular cause.

The feast was ended ; and as John Chester strode up the great hall with poor me (somewhat shame-faced to find myself in such company) trying to keep pace with his great steps, all there were free to stare at us to their hearts' content. And many were the curious glances cast at us as we made our way to the dais, where John halted and made obeisance to the assembled earls, while I was too frightened to do anything but stare.

"Welcome, Sir Laggard," rolled out Lancaster, in his hearty voice, for he could be hearty enough when he chose. "And what account have you to give of yourself and of this belated coming? Here is your lord, the noble Pembroke, chafing at the delay, and you, I make no doubt, playing the toss-pot in every alehouse 'twixt this and Middleham."

"An' it please you, my lord," replied John Chester, "I am no toss-pot, but the roads——"

But ere he could finish, the earl's roving glance fell on poor me.

"How now?" he cried. "What new gear is this? Art growing proud, John Chester, that you needs must have your page like your betters, and by my father's head, not a bad-looking lad, either? Who is he?"

"I' fegs," replied John, who seemed quite at home in this great company, "'tis but a lad of your own, royal Lancaster, whom I fished out of a brook beyond North Allerton, where he was like enough to drown."

And as he spoke a great laugh rose at the retort, and even Lancaster himself joined in, try as he would to frown.

"Stand forward, boy!" he cried to me. "And give us an account for yourself. Who are you, and from whence?"

"My name, lord earl," said I, trembling a little, and blushing too, "is Aubrey de Mauleverer, and I come, by your lordship's orders, from Embleton to this spot."

Whereat the earl rapped out a great oath, and called for Thomas Colson to stand forth. And a burly esquire, looking sadly sheepish, answered to the call.

"Stand you there, friend Thomas," said my lord, so sternly that I trembled too; "I have your story of these things. Now, let us hear the lad's."

And at his bidding I told him, in the presence of that great company, all exactly as it chanced. And as I spoke, he frowned more and more, and finally turning to the squire, cried in a great voice—

"How now, sirrah? I have hanged a man for less than this."

The esquire threw himself upon his knees and begged for mercy.

"My lord," he said, "I have served this house for thirty years, and never yet fallen under censure. Do not, I pray you, visit this one offence, the outcome of

a cup of wine—drugged, too, as I will swear—so hardly on my head.”

A silence had fallen on all in the hall, and every sound was hushed as Lancaster, turning to the lords around him, appealed for counsel in this matter.

“My lords,” said he, “John Chester is right. The boy is a ward of mine, to whom, for his father’s sake, I wish well. A month gone, I was minded to have him brought here, and gave letters to that effect to yonder oof, to ride into Northumberland and bring him for me. A week after he set out he returned empty-handed, nay, even without my despatches, which he said had been robbed of him when powerless through drugged wine. Other matters put the boy out of my head, and never thinking it was him they aimed at, I let the matter pass till some more fitting season, thereby, as it would seem, nearly costing the lad his life. What say you—is this fellow’s life forfeit for his crime?”

For a space no one spoke, and then De Bohun broke in—

“If the matter rested with me, my lord,” he said, with a laugh, “I should leave the decision to yonder page. He seems well able to take care of himself, even against odds, unless friend John has overdone the matter of that dagger-thrust. His was the risk; let him assign the forfeit.”

And through the hall there went a hum of assent to this strange proposition.

The earl turned his face to me.

“Boy, you have heard the way it comes that you fell into the hands of some who wished you ill. It will be my charge to find them and their reason for so

acting. It is your business to say whether or no that laggard yonder shall swing from the Carlton tower this night or not."

But the thought of causing two men's death within the space of two days terrified me.

"Noble earl!" I cried, falling on my knees; "for me he shall go free, seeing no harm has come of it, but only justice, for which I crave your pardon, seeing I struck in self-defence."

"A proper answer," said the earl. "Sirrah, you go free, and let it be a lesson to you. And now, good John, to the buttery and slake thy thirst, and break meat. Away with you."

"Not so, my lord. I have other things to tell."

"Why, 'tis a very Paladin, or adventurous knight. What other chance befell you, John?"

"My lords, the fox is loose."

I have said how before a hush fell on those present; what shall I say now of the awful yell which rose from, maybe, a couple of hundred throats? These men were banded together to destroy Gaveston, and thought him safe across the seas in Ireland; and this tidings of John Chester's smote them as a thunderclap might have done. Howls, curses, imprecations arose from baron or knight, and it was full ten minutes before the din was hushed enough to let John tell his tale.

And as he finished, the savage Warwick smote his fist on the table with such a blow as might have felled an ox.

"He called me dog," he growled; "let him look to it that I do not get my teeth into him ere long."

But Pembroke's voice broke in through the hubbub.

"My lords," said he, "John Chester only tells the truth, and therefore will I vouch my honour this Gaveston is in York. But with or without the king's connivance? That is ours to seek. Who rides to York to learn?"

Then up rose Warren de Lisle, and drew his cloak around him.

"You are right, noble Pembroke," he answered. "This time to-morrow I trust to bring you the news you lack."

And, mid a breathless silence, he strode from the hall.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT BEFELL ME IN THE KEEP.

NEVER in a life which has not been without its moving scenes have I known men so disturbed as were the garrison of Pontefract on hearing John Chester's news. It was not alone the great nobles that were angered at the king's perfidy, for the common folk seemed quite as angry as their betters, and the only thing that was heard throughout the castle all that night and all the following day was that they were going to have such a vengeance of the Earl of Cornwall, and if need be of the king's own grace, as they should both remember. I own that my heart sank as I thought of my chance acquaintance, and wondered how one man, and he a foreigner, could look to make headway against an angry nation in arms—for it was almost that. I stood by the gate with John Chester that night, watching the messengers speeding forth in troops at a time to carry to every county and shire of old England the news that "the fox was loose" (for that seemed to be the phrase which all men understood), and as I heard each knight or esquire or humble man-at-arms cry out to the seneschal his destination and the name and titles of his lord, it seemed to me as

if in all my native land there would not be one corner unvisited when these had ridden home.

For myself the earl seemed a little puzzled what to do with me, but he told me frankly that when he sent for me he had had no thought of this, being minded in truth to set his face southwards to the meeting of Parliament which had been summoned to meet in Westminster in the coming Ascensontide. He said he had but his military household with him, in which there could be no place for me, and that he did not care to carry one so young to the war, which he, and all the earls in fact, believed to be about to begin. He would be forced, so he feared, to leave me behind in Pontefract, and even that he shrank from, seeing that I had unknown enemies, whom he must needs seek out before he could avenge the insult to me and to himself. And so the matter rested that afternoon. For the day or two I could wait upon him, as I should then be too near his person for any to dare to strike at. And so that day I commenced my duties as a page.

I spent the afternoon wandering about the mighty castle, admiring its strength, and the beauty of the architecture. And if one incident more than another pleased me that day it was when there came to me that very Thomas Colson, whom the earl had been minded to hang the day before on my account. He was a great rough fellow, but to my thinking honest enough, so that I could readily believe him when he assured me of his innocence of any share in the plot against me. For that there had been such a plot no one seemed to doubt, but having been cautioned by the earl to make light of it, since he himself would on

occasion fathom the truth for me, I did not question this honest esquire as otherwise I should have sought to do.

It was my duty that day to wait upon the earl in the hall, and after it I was free to retire, if I wished to do so. And being tired with my long ride on the previous day—the stiffness of which did not leave me so readily as I could have wished—and with my wanderings through this great and wondrous fortress, I was glad enough to slip away so soon as the supper in the hall was ended, which was near upon seven of the clock, and, going to the earl's chamber, to wait his coming, as I knew he would so soon as the grace cup was passed.

Now whether it was the fatigue that I had undergone or the heavy meal I know not, but I was sleepy as I had never felt sleepy before. I have thought it was the last cause, for whereas to fatigue I was well accustomed, both at the manor and since on the road, such luxury of meat and drink as was the rule of this castle I had never seen before. Their supper was nigh on two hours in the serving, with much variety of dishes and high spices, invented, as they tell me, by our neighbours the French, which have made what on the border we deem but a necessity in these southern towns an art. Had I not seen it then I could scarce have believed that the cooks could have obtained such mastery of their viands, twisting and torturing them in diverse manners, so that this took such a shape, and that a form and taste which nature had never meant it to have. Myself I have always set my face against luxury like this, and of all the acts of our late King Edward II. have held none in such esteem as that edict which he published

against the extravagance of the nobility in the furnishing of their tables. Few things in sooth he did that others might conscientiously approve; but this I hold to be a kingly act, this curbing of extravagance of the table, which can only tend to exasperate the starving Commons and to enervate the leaders of our people. And, truly, at this time Earl Thomas set an evil fashion in this matter, part, perhaps, of the open-handed liberality which he loved to affect, but to my thinking, wrongly.

The earl's own chamber was laid in the centre storey of that great tower or keep which had so astonished me when first I saw it. It was a fine room, too, and grandly furnished, though lacking the air which I had known at the manor house, for the windows were small, as they must be in such places of strength. In it there stood a great bedstead of wood, with hangings of red cloth, such as befitted his rank, and on the bed a wool pack and a bolster, and a coverlet also of cloth. A great wooden chair stood by it, and before the fire a settle, and the floor was strewn with rushes, which (as they told me) he would cause to be changed once in the month at least. A lordly chamber, lordly furnished it was, for, besides the things I have named, a great oak press stood in one corner for his convenience, and near this stood his sword and lance, his armour being doubtless with the armourer against he needed it again.

Into this chamber came I weary, and, if the truth be told, rubbing the sleep from my eyes. And very speedily, finding my lord did not come to dismiss me, I began to seek some corner where I might curl myself up in my cloak and rest till his coming called me to

my duties. And as it chanced there was such a space as a boy might lie in in the recess behind the press, where I could be snug and free of the draught, for the wind played over freely for my liking round that room.

Now it chanced the sleep in me was heavier than I had thought, and when I woke presently there was in the room the murmur of voices of men speaking with bated breath. At first these sounds were mingled with my dreams, but as I came to consciousness of where I was I began to see that I was in a pretty scrape, for the two men who were thus holding confidential talk together were my lord and De Valence, the most trusted of his advisers at this time.

When I knew what was happening I fairly shivered, for the things they said were such as no man save themselves was meant to hear,—least of all a thoughtless boy like me. But for once my prudence deserted me, and in place of rising and boldly avowing my presence, as I should have done, when, doubtless, they would have dismissed me with a caution not to offend so again, I lay still, hoping that I might not be discovered, and might make my escape later when the visitor retired.

It was a foolish thought, and one which went near to my undoing. To begin with, these two, safe as they thought from prying ears, were saying things regarding which I have been silent to this day. For what they spoke was treason against their king and mine, treason such as in the days which followed has often cost a man his head, and which even then frightened me so that I could scarce refrain from crying out.

It was Lancaster who was speaking when I woke.

“To sum up, then, noble Pembroke,” he said, “it amounts to this. If this Gascon is there by the king’s contriving, we have our work to do again. If he has come of himself we shall be no better off, for once this faithless liege lord of ours sees his favourite again and hears his voice, he will dance to the tune of Gaveston’s piping as he ever did of yore. And even if the king again disown him it will rest with us to visit his disobedience on his head, so that whichever way I turn the thing spells civil war.”

“Ay,” said De Valence slowly, as a man does who thinks as he speaks. “And for my own part I do despair so of the future of the realm that I am almost minded to leave them to their work, and retire for a space to my own estates.”

“Nay, nay, kind Pembroke,” cried the other, “that is not yourself who speaks. Why, for my own part, were I minded to do so, the shade of the great Earl of Lincoln, in whose chamber we stand, would haunt me. Know that when the proud De Lacey lay dying he charged me, who, since his own poor sons were dead, stood nearest to him in the right of my wife, never to turn my hand from the plough till England was free of this curse. That was the charge laid on him by the late king, and by him passed on to me; and while I have a hand to strike or a head to plan, I swear that Thomas Plantagenet will never rest till England and England’s king are free of this curse.”

You could have heard a feather falling, so still was the chamber as he finished, and perhaps a minute passed before the measured tones of Pembroke followed in their turn.

“If I would leave the doing of this thing to

others," quoth he, "it is because I have heard that which tells me that nearer the king's bosom there is in the forging the blade which shall cut us free. Know, royal Lancaster, that I have it that the queen is Gaveston's bitterest foe, and——"

"The queen!" exclaimed my lord. "How so?"

"I am told that she resents the kindness that the king lavishes on the Gascon to her neglect. When you and I, sir earl, with others, bade welcome the beautiful daughter of King Philip, there was one thing which I know struck us, as did her fair face—I mean her imperious will."

"You are right," cried the other in excitement. "By'r Ladye, you are right. And if it be as you say, and the queen believe herself a slighted woman, then I say this to you, De Valance, that all these other ills which have come to King Edward through the Gascon will be as nothing to what will chance to him if ever Isabella turns her hand against her lord."

"Yes," said his counsellor; "woe betide that man whose greatest enemy is in his own household; and, if she be a woman——"

And then suddenly he broke off, for a reason that I was to learn later. For the man to whom he was speaking had good cause to know the truth of what he said, and to rue both then and after the day when his uncle's royal will chose for his bride the faithless, fickle Lady Alice, last of the De Laceys, as she was the worst.

With my small heart a-thumping against my ribs to hear such words as these, I was fairly minded to spring forth and avow my presence. But the chance was no sooner thought of than gone. For at this instant there came such a knocking at the door that you

might have thought that the whole fortress was in the hands of an enemy, and like to be burned about its master's ears. And as the heads of one or more daggers hammered on the iron-bound oak, there came through its thickness loud cries—in many voices—for Lancaster to open, as their matter would not brook delay. And when at the summons my lord strode to the door and drew back the bolt there burst into the room a crowd of earls and barons and others of lesser degree—all, in fact, of any pretence then sheltered within the walls of the castle. And at their head they thrust the messenger, De Lisle, with armour rusted and head to foot in mud, who as he entered cried in angry tones, as of one whose wrath has been in the nursing all the day—

“Lord earl, John Chester spoke the truth. The Gascon is now with the king.”

“But how and why?” replied my lord.

“By the king's contriving,” was the answer. “In York they knew of his coming a week since.”

Then did the earl rap out a mighty oath, which the rest repeated, each to his liking, so that the roar of it echoed through the vaulted chamber, as thunder does. And so, without a moment's thought, Lancaster turned to the messenger again.

“Thanks, kind De Lisle,” he said. “You have done Thomas Plantagenet one service to-day—prithce, add one other. We are all unarmed, but your trusty sword, never drawn save for the right, is girded to your side. Stand for me in the outer chamber before this bolted door, and suffer none to leave or to enter before I give the word.”

The others stood aside as the pair walked to the

door, and as the knight passed through it my lord closed and bolted it at his heels. Then, turning to the others, he spoke to each by name—

“Listen! every man listen to me,” he said, so sternly that I trembled so in my hole that I dreaded the very rattling of my bones would betray me to them. “Listen! I say. My Cousin Gloucester, kind Pembroke, Warwick and Arundel, De Bohun, who never failed me yet, Percy and Clifford, and all others of every degree. Once again we are met to band ourselves together to save our realm from——”

“To save the king, lord earl,” cried Gloucester, quickly. “You forget the king’s grace.”

“Ay,” he went on wearily, “to save the king.” Then brightening again, as if glad to be rid of such a hollow pretext for his treason, he spoke with fire. “We have it that the fox is here; then be we the hounds. This is no time for words. Out daggers every man, and on the sign of our common redemption swear after me, ‘I will not rest until I have seen this land free from its curse the Gascon, so help me God!’”

“So help me God!” they cried, as each man kissed the crosshilt of his dagger, and so the thing was done.

But here began my share, one I would fain have had omitted, for at this instant my lord, lacking something from the press, came to the corner where I was lurking, and as he touched the lid saw me plain enough. And so did Percy, who haled me forth with a great cry of rage. In another instant half a dozen of their ready daggers had been quivering in my carcase and this tale ended, when De Bohun, chivalrous

ever as he was brave, snatched me from them, crying—

“No, no. ’Twere ill to open this business with a murder. By my faith, it is the lad that knifed the jackman. How come you here, my boy?”

“No matter how he comes here,” cried the savage Warwick, “it is enough that he holds all our lives in his hand. Away with him, sirs, he has got to die; and, being a child, it were kind to do it swiftly.”

And even while I cursed his kindness he raised his hand to strike at me, but Gloucester caught his arm, and so saved me a second time; while Lancaster stepped forward, and being recovered of the surprise of finding me as he did, exclaimed—

“No, no, gentle Warwick, De Bohun is right. No murder here, lest we bring on us the curse of innocent blood. Besides,” he added, with a carelessness I would swear he did not feel, “the boy is staunch. Swear him one of us if you like, but slay him not. ’Tis better to put his neck in the halter that maybe awaits us all.”

Perhaps it was his influence that swayed them; perhaps the conceit pleased them; perhaps—as I have hoped—they thought with him that I was staunch. Anyway, they swore me with the same oath, and thenceforth no more molested me, but suffered my presence while they laid their plans.

It is all so long forgotten now that it matters little what they ordered for this one and that. An hour later my lord drew the bolt, and they went out, leaving only Lord Pembroke with my master.

I would have followed with the others, but Lanc-

aster signed to me to stop, and presently closing the door called me to his side.

"Boy," he said, not unkindly, "what brought you to this room?"

I told him honestly and truly, just as I have set it down here, and he and Pembroke heard me, neither doubting that I spoke the truth. But when I finished he turned to his companion.

"De Valence," quoth he, "what can I do with this lad?"

"What would you do with him?" asked Pembroke.

"It is this way. Twice already have I brought him within an ace of his death, once on the road hither and once again to-night. The third time he may not fare so well, and wishing the lad to come by no harm through me, who of a truth would serve him if I could, I am fairly bested what I can do."

"Why not leave him here?"

"Because I know that there are those who seek his life——"

"The life of a child like that?" was Pembroke's doubting answer.

"Yes, and wherefore I do not know. Indeed, I doubt if any could advise me, except Father Anselm, who knows more of the lad's story than he will impart. And how can I, with all these weighty matters in hand, spare thought or time to watch him, as he needs be watched?"

"Make him over to some esquire then."

"To Thomas Colson, for example, who has served him so well already that he was like to have died through him. No; that is idle to think of."

"What do you want? Is it that you would have me take him for you?"

"That might serve."

I suppose I pricked up my ears to find myself disposed of thus, for De Valence put it another way.

"Nay, ask himself," he said. "He has seen what he may come to. Let him choose for himself."

"What do you say, boy?"

The words came from my heart as I answered. "My lord, you have been all the father to me that I have known since I have lost my own. You have fed and clothed me, and——"

A kind hand was placed on my head, and there was a tenderness in the earl's voice as he answered—

"And if for reasons which seem good to me I send you to my friend?"

"Why, then, my lord," I said, not thinking, but speaking just what came into my mind, "I shall be with John Chester, who brought me to your lordship, and who might take me back."

"By'r Ladye, the boy has solved the riddle," he exclaimed. "John Chester is the man to watch over him, De Valence, with your consent."

"Which I give freely. He is a lad of spirit, and I will do my best to see he comes by no harm."

A promise he kept faithfully to his dying day, as I know to my advantage. But then my only thought was that I should go to honest John, my other friend. And perhaps, for all the earl's kindness, I liked him less of the two, for he could be so stern at times. Now John might sulk, but he was never so.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW THE EARLS CAME TO YORK.

AND so it came about that that night I lay once more under John Chester's cloak, and I think that we were both the happier that it was so. And John told me, even before I went to sleep, how glad and proud he was to have his old master's son under his care. He spoke of other things, too, among them telling me that in the De Valence's household they kept a stricter rule than most of the other barons observed. Indeed, from what I saw in those early days, it seemed to me that the vows of their knighthood were oftener on their lips than in their hearts, and that the religious duties of true chivalry were with most of them perfunctory at best. It was not so with the Earl of Pembroke, for he, waking an hour or so before the rest had slept off their yesterday's fatigues, bade me attend him to the priory church of All Saints, just out the castle walls, being minded, even in the midst of such a stress of warlike preparations, to hear a Mass and confess his sins ere he took the road.

And what a stress of war it was ! When an hour after sunrise on that bright March morning I rode in Pembroke's train to the gathering ground on the hill

which lies eastward of the castle, the hill which they tell me is now named after St. Thomas, our newest English saint (though why our father the pope should have dubbed saint such as he was, to my own knowing, has puzzled me not a little in these last years), the whole of the town was ringing with the clang of armed men, and the tramp of their steeds. On the ground itself, where the barons were mustering their men, was a sight such as I had never pictured in my wildest dreams. For it would seem that even before this tidings the town had been well filled with the trains of the barons and knights, who were gathered together to taste the hospitality of Pontefract's lord, and for the past two nights and day there had been crowding in Lancaster's retainers from every spot that his messengers had time to reach. And a brave show they made, and it was well for me that I had John Chester at my elbow to read me the pennons of the various lords, and to tell the kinds and uses of the different bands. For they seemed to my ignorance, who had pictured all warriors to be like our northern troopers—to each man his horse, his sword, his lance, and coat of mail—to be, many of them, but indifferently equipped for war. For there were men from every part of our England rubbing shoulders with the semi-savage soldiery of Wales. And John, who was an ever ready tutor, bade me note before all the stout archers of Wakefield, the flower of our English bowmen, whose boast it was that each man of them carried in his belt four and twenty foemen's lives. There, too, were the pikemen, clad in their leathern jerkins, with gloves and caps of steel, and in each man's hand his short spear. And then he bade me observe the hobblers (as they called

them), horsemen of little account in battle, but swift to strike in raid or border warfare. But to me the one thing there was the real chivalry, the barons, knights, and esquires, and the sturdy men-at-arms, cased from crown to toe in steel, their tall spears rising over each troop as thick as trees in the forest, and their mighty horses chafing as though they, too, understood the pride of their calling, and longed to hear the trumpet summons once again. And as the leaders, whose names I have recited before, rode in their turn upon the field, loud were the shouts which rent the air, but especially was this so when Humphry de Bohun, the Constable of England, Hereford's peerless earl, than whom I have never known knight-readier in battle or more chivalrous in hall, rode round to marshal the troops to their appointed places. And when at last royal Lancaster appeared, and waved his leading staff as signal to us to move on our road, there burst from that host such a shout of "Lancaster, Lancaster! Hail to his country's friend!" as brought a blush of pride and pleasure to his haughty face. He stood at that moment nigh to the highest pinnacle of his greatness, and how could any of those who thought him irresistible foresee the coming time when, after a few short years, he should cross that very hill in very different guise.

All day we pressed on towards York, where we hoped to find the king, and the shades of night were setting in when we, the horsemen, having left the footmen far behind us, drew rein on the Knavesmire within full sight of the grey walls of York. And while De Bohun rode forward with a trumpet to summon the garrison in the Lords Ordainers' name, John

spoke to me a little of this ancient city (the oldest, he said, in England, in which I sometimes doubt that he was right), where even Roman emperors were born and lived and died, and where part of the walls had stood for as much as a thousand years. And he told me, too, how the king was minded then to repair the breaches time had made in the fortifications, but lacked the money for it—indeed, several years passed before he did this thing, wishing both to make a barrier against the invading Scots, and to menace Pontefract, the stronghold of all the disaffection to his rule and throne. But there was little time for talk, for almost as soon as he was gone, the Constable was back again to tell us that the king had fled the previous day, and that we were free to enter if we wished. And so we did, each troop to seek such shelter as they could find. And here at once I found the truth of what John had told me, for while of the others some sought out their friends in the many great houses which border on the Mickle Gate—a long steep street leading from the bar by which we entered right to the river's edge—or sought such accommodation as the taverns offered (for the castle, which was held for the king, shut its gates in their faces), our good De Valence rode right through the city, across the swift Ouse, and on to where they are rebuilding the great church of St. Peter, part of which already showed its stately frame to our right, and to so the Bootham Bar, where beyond the town walls is a lesser enclosure, guarding the Abbey of St. Mary, whose mitred abbot is, next to the archbishop, the greatest churchman of the north, refusing, so they told me, to give even the Prince-Bishop of Durham precedence.

And surely it shows that these citizens of York are but godless folk, when it is necessary to ward the Church's property from their sacrilegious violence with walls like those of their own fenced town.

Here, when we knocked at the gate, the porter opened the wicket warily, for in those times of trouble they dared open to but few. But when he learned who sought admittance, he ran to tell the Lord Abbot, and swift the gates swung back on their hinges to let Alan de Nesse, the prior, welcome the abbey's honoured guest. And as we rode into the courtyard, we found there the venerable Lord Abbot, John de Gyllyng, who died the following year, and who, as proud Pembroke bent the knee before him, raised his withered hands to heaven, and called down from on high a blessing on the Church's faithful son.

I have said that the entertainment at Pontefract was lavish. I say now that in that rich abbey there was nothing lacking from our entertainment either, but indeed the fare, if plainer and less wasteful, was as ample for our needs. And there within those sacred walls we were free of the drunkenness and brawling, with which as I learned after our fellows had disturbed the town. For war is the time of a soldier's license, and the man who to-morrow bears himself like a hero too often overnight deserves the stocks. And we, may God forgive us for it, were rebels in arms that day and York the king's town.

It would seem that our leaders had not foreseen this flight of their liege lord from a place of strength, which in truth he lacked the following to defend. The summons they had issued to the people had been to gather in York, and so they were caught on the

horns of a dilemma, not seeing their right policy, but hesitating whether to wait for others or to post after the retreating king, who, as we learned, was hurrying towards the north. And so, after due deliberation, Lancaster ordered that we were well advised to try to fit things together by halting one day in this city to give as many as could time to come up, and on the second morning following the king. And thus it was arranged.

As after hearing Mass the next day after our arrival the earl was minded to wait on his leader and to take John Chester with him, it was ordered that I was to remain within the abbey walls, where they thought no harm could come to me. And so, finding myself free, and my ground somewhat circumscribed for my liking, I must needs stroll out into the orchard, which stretches down between the church and other buildings and the river, from whence a fine view of the city may be had. It was a pleasant place this abbey, large and open, and planted, after the manner of these churchmen, who were ever crafty in picking out the pleasantest spots, in one of the fairest meadows I have ever seen. I found too a monk who was wishful, I take it, to supplement what Father Peter had done for me in the way of ancient lore, for he came with me for a space, and discoursed most learnedly of Roman and Briton, and Saxon and Dane, and I know not what besides, using many hard words of Latin which it ill be- seems a layman to understand. Indeed of all his jargon, the only thing I cared for was his taking me to where the orchard was bounded by a massive tower, part of the city walls, cunningly fashioned with many sides, which he declared had been placed there by the

Romans, which I pretended to believe. For though I had John Chester's word for it that these Romans, who should be by right Italians, and who had little business in free England even if they were here, did really come thus far north; and though this tower's masonry was cunningly fashioned, as I say, in a manner different to the way our masons build now; yet I did not see what it mattered to him or me, seeing that they were there, and still sound enough to ward off a foeman's attack. Indeed I was getting weary with it all when there began to ring some bell, at which he gathered up his skirts and hurried off, promising to do more for me after the noontide refection (these monks are great eaters, methinks, for all their vows, and take more meals than health demands, this perhaps being the reason why they are for the most part so stout), which I determined he should not, and indeed avoided him most carefully so long as we were in the place. Being thus to my comfort ridded of this pestilent fellow, I was free to get me to the water's edge, where indeed I had been longing to be this hour or more. And as I made my way thither, through winding paths well lined with shrubs, for these monks are great gardeners, and love to plant benches in sunny spots, and shelter their backs from the wind with tall hedges of yew, which they cut to strange shapes, I thought I heard, as coming from the river bank, loud laughter, mingled with cries for aid. So I hurried forward, and presently came to a spot where a turn of my road brought me upon a scene such as I had never expected to see in such a place. For what I saw was a young damsel, of my own age or thereabouts, bending over the edge, and catching at something in the water be-

low her. And the something, as I presently saw, was a great fat mastiff puppy that had dropped like the foolish creature that he was in the water, and now for the slipperiness of the clay banks could not get out. So I just hooked my fingers through his collar as he grabbed at the greasy mud, and in a trice had him ashore. Then I found time to look at the girl. Now, puzzled as I was to find one of Eve's daughters on that monkish territory, I was more puzzled what to do or say to the girl herself. For of a truth I had hardly seen one of her sex since my poor mother died, and scurvily as Fortune had favoured me in the matter of boy playmates, in the matter of girls I had fared even worse. I trow I was nearly as frightened as surprised, and for the life of me could not say one word either by way of greeting or of such civility as the occasion seemed to need.

But if I was ill at ease she was not. I could see it, as I eyed her covertly, thinking all the time what a pretty creature she was. Moreover, she was finely dressed, as a nobleman's daughter would be, and the puppy (which was plainly her property) was rather suited to hall than cottage. And thus we stood eyeing each other for a space, when my little lady made me a demure curtsy, and spoke.

"I thank you, sir page," said she. "Methinks without your timely aid poor Bevys had drowned."

"His own fault, then," I replied curtly. "Had he tried a few strokes up the stream or down it—a small matter, seeing he can swim well enough—he would have found grass to scramble out of instead of that greasy mud. But puppies were ever fools."

"Not Bevys," she answered, with a toss of her

head. "Bevys is the cleverest dog you ever saw. Down, sir, down!" she added, as the cleverest dog was minded to show his wit by soiling her dainty frock. But I flicked him deftly with my switch, and knowing his master, he growled and retreated behind his lady.

"Why did you do that?" she asked.

"Because," I answered, "that pretty frock is far too good to be spoiled by a puppy's dirty paws."

"I am afraid you are cruel," she said.

"Then, if you think so, I am wasting my time here," I answered; and, doffing my bonnet, I stalked away.

She called me back.

"I did not wish," said she, "to send you away like this, without thanking you, which I do heartily, for helping poor Bevys."

But I was angry and stiff. Seeing which, she being better accustomed to the society of her fellows than I was, turned to me again, and asked if I was of Lord Pembroke's train, to which I replied that I was.

"Then I hope," said she, "that you will break a lance in my honour, sir page, when you ride to the wars."

Again I thought that she was making fun of me, and I longed to get away from this tormentor, had I but known how.

"I do not fight," I said. "At least not in the wars. I hope to some day, but for the time it is not mine to join in the battle, but to see others do so."

She looked at me with the laughter dancing in her eyes.

"I fear, sir," she said demurely, "that you are but

a carpet knight at best, and that you ride to the wars of necessity and not of your own choice. I hear Lord Pembroke is a gallant man, and I marvel that he carries in his train one who——”

But I could stand no more.

“Fighter or no fighter,” I blurted out, “twice within this sennight have I stood in the very shadow of death—so near that the turn of the scale against me needed but a hair’s weight to do it.”

She looked at me in some surprise.

“Surely,” she said, “you do romance. Nay, sir,” as I turned away in anger again, “if I be wrong, I crave your pardon. Tell me, how did this chance?”

And I told her, and so honestly, that I think she understood I spoke the truth. And as I finished she, who was pale enough now, and whose pitying eyes turned on me with a look so soft and gentle that I thought I had never seen anything so lovable in all my life, said to me this—

“Sir page, what is your name?”

“My name,” I answered, “matters not”—for I was mindful of the cautions I had had before.

“As you will. Well, my poor unknown, when you are gone to your wars—which in truth are dreadful things—and I to my home, I will pray to our Lady and good St. George to bear you safe from harm. Now you have told me a little of yourself I can feel for you, for I have neither father nor mother of my own.” She plucked from her bosom a dainty kerchief and threw it to me here. “Take this to be your guerdon, and may it bring you fortune and guard you safe from ill.”

I fell on my knee at her feet and kissed her hand,

why I know not, unless I had guessed or heard somewhere that this was right when a fair lady showed her knight (though of course I was no knight as yet) her favour.

“Lady,” I said, “in whose honour shall I wear this?”

“Nay,” she answered, with a merry laugh, for her mood was changing again, so fickle was she, “if you would hold your name you shall have none of mine.”

But at this instant an interruption came to us. Almost at my elbow a mocking voice exclaimed—

“Very pretty, sir baron; very pretty indeed! I could scarce have done it better of myself.”

The damsel flung away my hand, and her cheeks turned first red and then grew pale. As for me, I sprang to my feet and turned towards the sounds, to see that there were two, the one a black-browed, elderly man in a richly furred gown, leaning on the arm of a younger companion, whose mocking face told me he had been the speaker.

“Alison, what means this?” asked the elder of the twain.

But my damsel answering not a word, he turned on me a look in which I thought ill-humour was mingled with hate.

“And you, sirrah, know that I permit no man’s groom, however great his master, to address my ward.”

“I am no groom,” I answered, stung by his insolence, “but Lord Pembroke’s page; and if it comes to birth, I dare wager that a Mauleverer——”

Never shall I forget the awful look that came into that man’s face as I spoke my name. Its meaning I did not even guess for many a day after, but I caught

the menacing gesture he made as he stepped towards me, almost involuntarily I doubt not, and, scenting danger, I whipped my dagger from its sheath.

"Back!" I cried. "I drove this through the heart of the last man that laid hand on me, and I trow I will do it again, be you my lord or such another jackman as the last."

And at my words he shrank back as if I had struck him, staring at me the while. And as he did so, the prior with Lord Pembroke, who it chanced were taking counsel together, came upon us and found us thus.

"How now, Sir Simon," exclaimed the churchman, "brawling in these holy precincts; and you, sir page? A drawn dagger warrants a whipping, I doubt not——"

"I would not have him hand me," I cried. "My lord, I ask your protection."

I could see there sat on De Valence's brow a puzzled look, as he turned to my enemy.

"How is this, sir baron? Did you lay hand on the boy?"

"If I did he was insolent. I found him conversing with the Lady Alison here, and I forbade it. That was all."

"Why did you look as though you wished me dead?" I cried unheedingly, and as I spoke my lord turned on this stranger a piercing look.

"Sir knight, or baron, as I believe the king has dubbed you this sennight past," said he, "into the truth of this I shall not further probe. But this I warn you, this my page's life is valued by others greater than myself. If he come by harm it will go

ill with any whom we suspect. I give you good day, sir, and trust you may treasure my words."

He turned on his heel, and signing to me to follow him, drew his arm through the prior's and led him aside. And to his question he answered—

"Anselm knows. I do not understand this gear myself."

CHAPTER VII.

THE PURSUIT AND SURRENDER OF PIERS GAVESTON.

WHEN I told John Chester what had chanced in the orchard, as I did that very afternoon, he asked me what my lord had said; and hearing his remark concerning Father Anselm, he slapped his thigh, as was his wont—for John, rough and unlearned as he was, never used hard words, as so many of the esquires did, but held it a point of honour that De Valence's favourite esquire should be as careful of his words as was the earl himself—John, I say, slapped his thigh, as was his wont when moved, and cried that the earl had the right sow by the ear.

“This Maurepart,” quoth he, “is just such a one as would meditate hard usage to a boy. But let him look to it. In my time I have done Father Anselm a service or two, and when I meet him I also will inquire; and if I find that I am right, I will have vengeance of the man, whether he be knight or baron or belted earl, who has contrived this dastard plot.”

Which brave words I believed, though now I know better, and can allow for the excitement which leads

men to promise what they can never hope to fulfil. I was grateful to John none the less, and it was to me a matter of great moment to find that I, who had thought myself so friendless hitherto, was surrounded by those—ay, some of them great nobles, too,—who wished me well.

But when I asked when he thought that we might fall in with this monk whom they called Anselm, he scratched his head and answered that was more than any man dare say.

“For you know,” he said, “this Anselm is a very will o’ the wisp in his ways, and hovers near a man for weeks, now in this place and now in another, without his being able to lay hand on him. He may be here in this very house to-night, and gone before I could seek him out, or he may be in far Scotland, for his business takes him to all sorts of places.”

So, too, when I asked about this Maurepart, though he knew something, he was not very satisfying in his words.

“Simon de Maurepart,” said he, “owes such importance as he boasts to his being the brother of Dame Alison de Beauchamp, now some years deceased, whose husband was a famous knight of the first Edward’s court, and possessed broad lands in the south. He dying, bequeathed all his possessions, first to his widow, and then to his only child—a mere baby when he died—and, more’s the pity of it, a girl, whose guardian this Simon now is for our liege the king, the proper father of all who lose their own. Rumour does not deal very kindly with this man, who is or was a creature of Gaveston’s, and they say he has privily the grant of all his niece’s lands for life.”

“That will be the damsel I saw in the orchard?” I asked.

“Mayhap,” he replied, and would say no more, either then or in the days that followed, for indeed he seemed loth to speak of Maurepart again—perhaps because he would have me forget both the baron and the danger which threatened myself.

And of a truth there was plenty in those days to occupy us all, for the earls were hurrying northwards after the king, their following swelling as they went. For the king fled away with his slender train as fast as fleet horses could carry him, and we pursued more leisurely, as our greater numbers compelled. A nation stirred to its depths by deadly hatred is a fearsome thing, and hatred of the Gascon brought thousands flocking to our standard who would have thought it foul treason to take up arms against their king. And as I now can see, knowing all that has chanced since, there was nothing more sad in this business than the blindness which led so many foolish folk to mistake the result for the cause. Five-sixths of those who marched with us believed firmly that, once they could destroy the hated favourite, all would be well; and our king, being freed from this creature, who seemed to have the power of sapping his energy—nay, sucking his life’s blood from his heart, would be himself again, and bear himself as all men wished him to do, for his great father’s sake. They missed the truth, not seeing that it was the king made Gaveston, not Gaveston who marred the king; and so they levied sacrilegious war against the Lord’s anointed, protesting all the while they wished their sovereign well.

From York our powers marched as far as Newcastle

on the Tyne, and there were met by the news that the king, despairing of his own ability to protect his friend, had taken ship, and was far past us on his southward way. It seemed as if the headlong energy that carried our host along recked nothing of fatigue, for without dallying we turned back on the road by which we had just come, and as we reached the north of Yorkshire, heard that the king had landed Gaveston at the castle of Scarborough, and himself gone thence to Kingston-upon-Hull, and so to York, where he was now trying to gather forces to relieve his beleaguered friend. Vain hope for both of them! The whole nation, as I have said, seemed sworn to baulk him; and before he could do anything of moment, Lancaster, with a great army, had thrown himself 'twixt York and Scarborough, while our good De Valence, with Lord Percy and Clifford, seized the town or village of Scarborough, and cut Gaveston off from succours by land.

It was a place of great strength, this castle, built, like so many of our eastern fortresses, on a bluff standing high over the sea. It was a great sea-washed rock, far higher over the water than my own Dunstanborough, and only connecting with the mainland by a narrow strip of ground, which sloped so quickly upwards that I have been told that William Le Gros, Earl of Albemarle and Holderness, who in King Stephen's time built the great keep which overlooks the entrance, was wont to boast that the battering engine would never be made that should swing with any effect upwards against his outer defences. And truly, from what I saw of it, I think that he was right, but in the siege of such places there is another enemy

more powerful than mere force, and that is slow starvation. The place was not provisioned, and the Earl of Cornwall had no friends to look to to help him in this matter, and so he fell an easy prey, as much from his own generosity as from any necessities of the case. At midday, on the Feast of the Ascension, Lord Pembroke invested the place, and four days later Gaveston sent a knight to parley, saying he had little faith in the coming of speedy succours, and that he would not put his following—who, to do them justice, were ready enough to hold out—to all the miseries of a hopeless blockade. For which I honour him. But when the knight came to our leaders, the only answer he could get was that with the garrison we had no quarrel, only with Gaveston himself. And when he sent a second time to ask for terms, the reply was short and stern, that he must yield without conditions of any kind.

On learning this they told us afterwards the earl began to lose all hope. But he, like all the rest of us, had faith in the clemency and justice of my own dear master, and he sent to ask if he might parley with De Valence under a flag of truce, and to this our leader replied with courtesy that he would so receive and hear him, but not alone. His fellows, Percy and Clifford, must be present too. And for a place of meeting they appointed the church, which lies scarce a bowshot from the castle gate, and to this sacred place Gaveston presently came.

Pembroke received him suitably attended. Not only were his fellow-leaders there, but a company of knights and we of his household, a gallant show for any man to see. And when the Earl of Cornwall entered, almost alone, for he was not willing that any of

the others should run their necks into the halter on his account, he too bore himself bravely enough, and in his bright armour, with nodding plumes and baldrick, looked every inch the gallant man he was. But to my thinking (and standing close beside my lord I could see him closely and hear every word that was uttered on either side), his face was lined with care, and the great black rings round his eyes and the twitching of the corners of his mouth, bespoke a mind but ill at ease. But he came up bravely, and saluted the assembled lords with courtly politeness, when to my sorrow, of all those present, De Valence alone returned his salute. And so the parley opened, and I trow that in the hearts of those two, the first actors in this opening scene of the great tragedy, there was present the memory of the last occasion they had met, the time when at the tournament of Wallingford Gaveston had marred the honour he won fairly in the lists by coarse unseemly jibes at the gallant gentlemen his superior address had unhorsed. Time of a truth had brought its slow revenge. Then Gaveston's star was in the ascendant, no man more powerful or prosperous than he, and now he stood face to face with the representative of the vanquished, who was become his judge. And as he looked around that company there met him on every side black lowering looks, telling the hatred that choked the kinder feeling of the knightly adversaries before him, and I know he could not but have felt that his sole stay in that dread hour was the courtly chivalry of my own kind De Valence. Friendship or countenance he would have from none.

For a space there was silence, ominous to the vanquished, before either spoke. And then Gaveston,

seeing Lord Pembroke waited his pleasure, addressed himself to him.

"I come, my lord," he said, "to crave the favour of a private interview with yourself alone."

"I have no secrets from my comrades-in-arms," replied De Valence, coldly. "Nor is there anywhere you can so fitly speak, or I so fitly hear, as among these knights, with whom, equally with myself, rests the power of disposing of the persons of our prisoners taken in war."

"Fortune for the moment rests with you, lord earl," answered Gaveston, hastily. "I trust you are minded to make a merciful use of the advantage you have gained."

"I trust," replied my master coldly, "that it may never be said that De Valence heaped on a vanquished foemen any insult which he may blush to remember in after days."

The other seemed uneasy on hearing this reminder of his own past misdeeds.

"Rankles that sorry jest as yet, my lord?" he asked.

"There are some jests," returned De Valence, sternly, "such that they can be wiped out in blood alone. But enough of that. You have asked me to meet you here. What would you of me?"

"Terms, my lord."

"There can be no terms save one sort with a traitor," growled Clifford, who, to my thinking, was chafing at the courtesy the earl showed to the hated foe.

"Methinks, sir," retorted Gaveston, hotly, "that the word traitor applies best to those in arms against their lawful king."

"Peace, Clifford," cried Pembroke, ere the baron could frame his answer. "And you, sir," he added to Gaveston, "have a care. We are in no humour to bandy words with you. Say your say and begone."

"Noble De Valence, I ask for terms."

"And I have none to grant, sir earl. Surrender unconditionally, and I will pledge my word to see you have all that justice merits. More I cannot say."

"No, surely," cried Percy, hotly. "That is more than enough."

"De Valence," said the petitioner, and his voice was true and manly and rang with feeling, "as you hope for mercy in your turn, hearken to me, and do not let your nobler nature be led astray by such as these two by your side. I may well, if I wish it, hold out yet for days, or weeks, for the place is strong and my men honest. But for their sakes I would not cause such suffering as this siege must entail. My lord, the king has promised to succour me within a month from now. I ask this of your courtesy, knowing I could not ask the favour of a truer knight. Let me, in place of lying leaguered within these walls, and bringing others under the shadow of the deep misfortune which hangs over me to-day, place myself in your hands for that space, in your hands alone, I mean, and if when the time is finished my master the king shall have neither rescued me by force of arms or treaty, then, if it shall seem good to you, hand me to these others to do with as they will. But grant me this respite first."

I saw De Valence turn uneasily on his chair.

"How say you, my lords," he asked, "shall I grant this request? The place is strong, and holds

brave hearts, who are our countrymen. That they could hold their own for this space of thirty days is like enough, but why should we put them to such hurt, when by granting this request, which is honourable to the Earl of Cornwall, we may save it. What say you, I ask?"

But to hear his enemy praised was more than the brutal Clifford could bear.

"A month?" he cried indignantly. "Long ere that I trust the vultures may have the picking of the traitor's bones."

But such unknightly violence defeats itself. As Percy heard the shameful words a deep flush mounted to his face, and he sided forthwith with my lord.

"Nay, for my part," he said, "I think De Valence is right. My lord, if you will be guided by me, you will grant these terms, and I for one will pledge my sword to aid your keeping them."

"Thanks, Percy," said the earl, "that was spoken like yourself. Come, Clifford, may I not have your consent as well?"

"Never, De Valence," was the answer. "But, seeing Percy sides with his country's enemies, I will withdraw, and leave you twain free to do as your conscience lets you. By your leave there, sirs."

And such the butcher, for so he was at heart, swung through the crowd, and flinging hatred and defiance at the vanquished man, passed down the aisle of the church, and so went from our sight.

"My lord, I yield myself your prisoner," cried Gaveston, but as he fumbled at the belt he would unbuckle, his fingers muddled the clasp, and belt and sword fell clattering to the ground. Do what I would

I could not restrain myself, but darting forward I picked it up almost ere it touched the ground, and gave it back to him. He thanked me with a smile for the trifling service, and then with a bow handed it to De Valence, who as he took it was to my thinking strangely moved.

"God help you, Sir Piers!" he said solemnly. "For by my troth I do believe you to be past the aid of man."

"Ay, I may say 'amen' to that prayer," echoed Percy, scarcely less moved. "Sir Piers, your ways are not my ways, nor your interests mine, but I too say God help you, and bring you aright in this matter, if He so will."

Whereat De Valence rose, and motioning to the prisoner to follow him, prepared to leave the church. But before he did so he bent over and whispered something to John Chester, the meaning of which was soon apparent. For though there was no seeming delay, still we loitered for the space of a few minutes in the church, and when we passed out of the great door it was into a quadruple line of Pembroke's following drawn up on either side, who closed around us on the instant, and slowly moved towards my lord's lodging in the town.

Nor was this precaution unneeded, for no sooner did the great crowd, which had meanwhile gathered at the news that their hated enemy was within the church, catch sight of Gaveston, than there rose such a groaning and such cries as would have cheered the heart of Clifford himself. I, though I had no interest in the matter save that of admiration for the fallen earl, myself quailed before the hooting, and Gaveston,

walking just before me, fell back half a pace, so that Pembroke thought he had been struck. But he quickly recovered, and stepped firmly forward, side by side with our good earl, who was risking full half of his own just popularity with the common folk by the countenance he showed a fallen foe that day. I trow that had the earl neglected his precautions it had gone hard with Gaveston then, for the rabble mouthed and strained at him as hounds do at the leash; but the earl had foreseen this, and the brave show made by our following, led by the knights of Pembroke's household, overawed the opposition, and presently we brought our prisoner out of the throng in safety to our dwelling.

But no man knew better than did my lord that this was but the beginning of his troubles. His honour demanded that he should keep his word to the unfortunate captive, but how was it to be done? In face of all the hatred of his peers and of the common folk, it was like to tax his power to bear Gaveston harmless for the stated time, and then and there he took counsel with Percy—who to do him justice was as set on the prisoner's gaining the promised grace as he could be himself—what it were best to do. And to that council they called the Earl of Cornwall as well.

I think that if in the days of his prosperity Piers Gaveston had made enemies by the score, his bearing in these the days of his affliction won him friends not a few. There are, as I have found since, in this world men so constituted that they cannot bear prosperity, which seems to have the power to warp their better feelings, and to bring forth all that is ignoble, and to

foster those bad qualities from which what man is free? I know that within this month that he spent among us the Earl of Cornwall gained many friends in the household, and that even Percy, who had little cause to love or like him, and who to the last was a foe to the king's favourites, yet regretted nearly as deeply as we did, the earl and I, the disgraceful ending of this gallant and unfortunate knight.

But at that time the matter of his safety was so urgent as to brook no delay, and the three took counsel together as to what it were best to do. I was not told, nor any other, the true plan, but it was given out that Percy would ride post to Lancaster with the tidings, while De Valence guarded the prisoner. And all men saw the Baron of Alnwick ride as appointed.

But few saw a second party which sped southwards that very evening under cover of night. A score of trusty troopers, men whom De Valence could have looked to to die in his need, who under a grey-haired knight of the household, Sir John de Catton, long since gone to his last rest, stole through the silent streets some hour after sunset, and took the road for Hull. And with that troop rode I, and a tall knight heavily cloaked, who ere he started had passed his word to make no effort to escape on the road. De Valence went not with us—he must needs stop behind to say what he had done, nor did John Chester, who was in attendance on his lord, and who alone perhaps of those brought nearest to him, hated the prisoner to the end.

My going came about in this fashion. We durst have none of Sir Piers' own attendants from the cas-

tle to wait upon him, and the question arose how he might best be served. And this riddle he solved for himself, for it seems he had recognized me in the church even before I handed him his sword, and he had asked De Valence that I might go with him, and my lord, though not without sundry misgivings, had said that it should be so.

And so by unfrequented roads, and taking a course very far indeed from the most direct, did we ride southwards into Oxfordshire, where we presently came to my lord's manor of Deddington, where at our coming we found our own good earl, who, having told his allies what was done, and had from them a very grudging assent, had marched his powers southwards as swiftly as he could, and so arrived at his house in time to receive this unexpected guest.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BLACK DOG'S BITE.

So many years have passed over my head since the events of that month following the Ascensiontide of 1312, that I may crave forgiveness if my memory betrays me at times. Indeed, I would confess at once that, of the matters which stand here recorded, I know not which are of my own telling, and which but the outcome of the many things I have heard others discussing in the years which followed. But, in the outcome, the matter is the same; for I shall set down nothing but what I believe to be the truth. Now, when I am an old man, and cannot hope to be spared for long, methinks that these the doings of my boyhood stand out ever fresher, while much that has chanced in my robuster years stands blurred or altogether forgotten. And, of all the many strange events in which I played my part, there is not one which comes more vividly before my eyes than the closing scenes of Piers Gaveston's chequered life.

And such was the uneasiness throughout the length and breadth of this land at that time, that I do verily believe that no man knew what peace was. From the king to the common herd the thoughts of all men were fixed upon this prisoner of the earls, whom my

dear lord of Pembroke held in safe keeping at Deddington. Indeed, it was a weighty matter for all, seeing that if there were those who earnestly desired the death of the man they so hated, there were some—but a remnant, as I fear—who loved him, and others who shrank from the last extremity of all.

At the first news of the taking of the Earl of Cornwall at Scarborough men's words had been bold enough. The king had roundly vowed a rescue; while the Lords Ordainers had clamoured for the blood of their enemy, and with them, I grieve to say, were the sympathies of the commoner folk, who hated the favourite as an upstart and a foreigner. But, as the time wore on, it became daily more apparent that the king could not—the earls would not—have their will. And betwixt these two was set De Valence, who, of his wisdom, saw that to destroy one favourite was useless, seeing that they could not prevent the king's choosing another, and who shrank from shedding even his foeman's blood. He had stood bravely by his plighted word, refusing to yield up his captive to his clamorous allies until the month should be past; and now that the time was drawing to a close, he was minded to leave no stone unturned to deliver Sir Piers from those who thirsted for his blood. But yet he could not see the manner in which this was to be done, and was in dire perplexity between his desire to save his prisoner, to keep faith by his allies, and yet to save these last from taking such measures as would for ever enrage and alienate the king. And well had it been for all had they listened to his calmer counsel, and so saved to this realm and to themselves the miseries which afterwards befell us.

I have told how it was on the Feast of the Ascension, which in that year fell upon the 19th of May, that Gaveston surrendered himself at Scarborough into Pembroke's hands. The day I next remember well was on the 18th of the next month, when we were all still at Deddington, the king chafing like a caged beast in his helplessness at York, and the rest of the earls collected together in Warwick Castle waiting on events.

I well remember that at this time the twain to whom I was nearest, Pembroke and Sir Piers, looked on this matter very differently each from the other. For whereas my lord, in dire perplexity, it is true, hoped none the less so to guide the policy of his party that they should save their own and their country's honour without unduly exasperating the king, Gaveston had no hope of a favourable ending to his matter. He knew how weak the king was, how strong the confederation against him, and day by day he grew more despondent, and more shaken in his health.

I do not think that those who had seen him in the fulness of his prosperity a few weeks before, would have recognized the faded, broken-down man with whom I was sitting on that 18th of June. For I was always with him, by his own expressed wish, and De Valence, whose courtly nature was ever ready to do what in him lay to mitigate the rigours of a confinement which he would in no wise relax, had seen no cause to baulk him in so small a matter. And if to this day I hear others who only saw him in the days of his arrogance declaiming against his vices, I reply that to my knowledge no more accomplished knight or gentleman ever set lance in rest. For me he ever had

a kind word, and a kinder smile; to me he showed none of the pride that won him so many enemies; on me he never lavished those bitter quips which rankled in men's minds as does a poisoned dart. Now, in the days of his fall, he was both good and lovable, and it pleases me to look back upon times which would have been happy enough for both of us, could we but have forgotten the grim, dark shadow which overset us all. Nay, more, I say it freely, that in my after life I have profited vastly by the sage advice he gave me; for he bade me take warning by his fall, and never so bear myself in the days of my prosperity that in the day of my disgrace I should not have one friendly face on which to rest my eyes.

But twenty-four short hours now lay between us and the dread unknown, and in all the manor there was a feeling of unrest, as if something was to happen swiftly. It struck us all, within the prison and without it, for Gaveston was no guest, but held in as close ward to prevent his escaping as he was securely guarded against the malice of the earls. And, to our great undoing on this, the most momentous of all the days of that momentous month, a madness seized Lord Pembroke, which wrought the very catastrophe he was so earnestly minded to forestall. He saw no danger then, for, as I have said, since a good three weeks the earls, with a mighty following, had lain in Warwick Castle, making no sign; and he could see no cause why he should not ride forth that morning to Woodstock, there to take counsel with a trusted adviser, Abbot Gervase, of the house of Our Lady of Woodstock, to whom in moments of such anxiety he was ever wont to turn.

I have said that I was with the prisoner, and it so chanced that on this morning Sir Piers must needs ask how De Valence fared, and where he was.

"He has ridden to Woodstock," I answered.

"And why fares he thither?" was the next question.

"To seek counsel of Abbot Gervase," I answered, not caring to specify the matter more pertinently, though it was common gossip of the household why my lord was gone. But Gaveston himself filled in the rest.

"It were not hard to guess the reason," he said, with a sad smile. "The kites are gathering round this poor body of mine. Truly, they had best speed, else it will be too late."

I glanced at him as he spoke, and felt how true were his words. As he lay there on his couch (for such was his weakness begotten of despair that he seldom rose from it) I seemed to see the hand of death marked on his brow, and feeling it to be more than I could bear to look upon, I walked to the window to hide my own emotion.

I had gone there but to cloak my own weakness, but in turn I cast my eye over the broad park that stretched before the manor, as one will do whose thoughts are far away. And as I did so my attention was drawn on the instant to the further side, and seeing what I saw I could not forbear a cry.

"What is it, lad?" asked Gaveston.

Now what I had seen was this. High on the hill-top over against us there rose a cloud of dust, and through it glinted the dancing light of armour, and here and there there waved a pennon in the slight

breeze. Now this alarmed me, for I knew that my lord had ridden forth but slenderly attended, and that this was a gathering of several hundred men, and that if they came thus, with their power set in order and each man armed from cap to heel, it was no friendly visit to the manor's master, but a threatening to the man he held in ward. But yet my trembling lips dared not frame my suspicions in words.

Yet my silence and the frightened face I turned upon the prisoner told him all; and, rising heavily, he crawled to where I stood, and leaning on my shoulder peered across that sunlit space in turn. There was scarce a tremor in his voice as he put his next question.

"What is it, Aubrey? Who are these who ride hither in set array?" For the troop was defiling down the hillside (if hillside it could be called).

But I pretended I could not tell.

"Visitors for my lord," I answered.

"Ay, visitors," he answered, with a short laugh which sadly lacked merriment. "But of what kind? This means one of two things, my boy. Either the king is coming, or—the earls."

He paused again and then put another question.

"Your younger eyes can see clearest, Aubrey," he said. "Tell me what device they bear."

And as I strained my eyes his hand closed on my shoulder, gripping me so fiercely that I thought he would have bruised the flesh. But I scarce heeded that—my eyes were on the advancing horsemen, striving to read the device on the banner borne at their head by a tall knight. It was an awful moment for us both, and for a space while you might count per-

haps a hundred, I looked and he waited. And then a puff of wind shook out the great standard, and I saw its cognizance and cried in a frightened voice—

“Sir Piers, it is the Bear and Ragged Staff. Warwick is there I trow.”

“Enough!” he answered, as, still leaning on my shoulder, he walked towards the couch. “And the garrison? What will they do?”

“My lord, it is an open place, and Pembroke is absent, and——”

“As I thought. Well, Aubrey, I have little time, and would make the most of it. Have I your ears?”

He drew a packet from his bosom and laid it in my hands.

“These to the king,” he said; “and I charge you deliver them yourself. I would also have you bear to De Valence my thanks for his courtesy, and say, too, that I fully acquit him of all treachery or complicity in this mischance. Say as much to the king. For yourself take this” (and here he drew from his own neck a golden chain and threw it over mine), “it is all Piers Gaveston has to give, but take it as his token of love and kindness to his last, perhaps his only friend.”

I was trembling by now, for the dread of something to happen, too terrible for me to shape as yet even in thought, was upon me, and I scarce knew what to do. But he was calmer, and met his trouble as a brave man should. For he too saw that the crisis was near him; and, knowing the temper of those with whom he had to deal, was minded to make his peace with God and man while he had time, and

presently dropping on his knees, he spent a few minutes in prayer.

As for me, I stood by the window, watching the coming of the troop, which soon drew near the drawbridge over the moat, and parleyed with the guard upon the gate. Vainly I hoped for delay here. That was futile, and as Gaveston rose again I saw it could be but a question of minutes ere they came to seize and bear him away to I knew not what.

He was as calm and brave as ever.

"Hand me my doublet, Aubrey," he said. "I must meet them in the fittest guise I can. Don't tremble so—this is no matter of thine."

But my answer was to burst into tears and fling myself at his feet. He raised me quickly, with words of kindness and comfort.

"Nay, nay, good lad," he said, "grieve not for me. See, I need thy aid this once, so keep thy sorrow for hereafter, when soon enough Piers Gaveston's friends will mourn for him."

My trembling hands would hardly do their office, and had it not been for his own strong will, superior to his bodily weakness at this crisis of his fate, it would scarce have ended as he wished. Indeed his hasty toilet was but finished when a great shout from below told us that the garrison had joined hands with his foes. Then I helped him to the couch—for he was sore exhausted now—and so we waited for the coming of the end.

It was not long. Swiftly the armed footsteps rang ever nearer in the passage, and soon the door was flung wide open and half a dozen men rushed into the

room, and their leader laid his hand on Gaveston's shoulder.

"Arise, traitor, thou art taken!" he cried.

Sir Piers made no answer, but rose from the couch with pain. Seeing this weakness, a couple of men-at-arms caught him by either arm, and led him towards the door. As he reached it, he called to me—

"Fare thee well, Aubrey," he said.

"Nay, if he be page of thine, with thee he goes," retorted the knight, and bade one of the others bring me along. And so we came to the courtyard, where, in front of a great troop of horsemen, the Earl of Warwick sat on his steed.

"Hullo!" he cried, as he saw me, "whom have we here? D'Eyncourt, who is the boy?"

"We found him in the traitor's chamber," was the answer.

The other bent his fierce eyes on me again.

"Why, 'tis the page of Pontefract," he cried, in tones which betokened no great favour to me. "By my troth, boy, thou art over fond of trespassing on forbidden ground. How came you there?"

"By my lord's orders."

"Which lord?" he asked, with a sneer. "Nowadays we are all earls, it seems."

"Sir Aylmer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke," I answered, full as fiercely as himself, for it angered me to see him thus insulting to my fallen friend.

"Is this so? and can any one vouch it for him?" Whereat a hundred voices said I spoke the truth.

"Well, we have no quarrel with the following of our good friend De Valence," he answered carelessly; "unhand the boy."

And turning, he gave directions, so that in a few minutes the troop was ready to start again, with their prisoner securely bound to a stalwart man-at-arms in their midst, and on the instant they were gone.

It had all chanced so swiftly, that I had been stricken dumb by surprise. But now that the worst was over, and my poor friend still alive, I had time to think, and what was uppermost in my mind was that this would never have been dared by any of them had my lord been there. I reasoned that he alone could set the matter right, and so set about conveying to him the news which none of the rest of the household cared, or, indeed, dared to tell. I passed out into the village, no man hindering me or dreaming my purpose, which I dare say they would have forestalled, had they guessed it, and was at the outset confronted by this trouble that I had no horse. But Fortune favoured me that day. Beside the baker's house there was tied a mule, a sleek fat beast such as your prosperous churchmen love, left after their careless wont to nibble at such grass as he could find, while his master fared better within. To unloose and mount him was with me the work of an instant, and ere the beast was he had never travelled before, on the Woodstock rid of his surprise I was urging him, as perhaps road

In time we drew up at the gate of the abbey, the mule in a fine lather, and I somewhat out of breath between the jolting and the labour of urging my charger to his speed. But when the porter put his eye to the wicket he ran to fetch the sacristan, so great was his surprise. And speedily we were surrounded by a dozen or so of shavelings, all agape to

see this strange sight, of a page in Lord Pembroke's livery on a churchman's mule.

"Why, alack!" cried the porter in dismay. "Sure 'tis the learned Father Ambrose's beast. He left us but this morning on his road to Oxford to take part in to-morrow's disputation in the schools."

"And what manner of imp is this that bestrideth him?" groaned the sacristan.

But I was in no mood for delay. I flung myself from the mule at once.

"Vade retro Sathana," groaned the nearest monk, on whose foot I chanced to land.

"Where is my lord of Pembroke?" I cried in answer, unheeding of them and their words. "Take me to him, I pray thee, father."

"Nay," said the porter, "that may hardly be. The hour of supper is past, and the reverend abbot has led the good earl to his private parlour, where they are cracking a flag—I should say are speaking of matters of State. It were a fortnight's penance for me were I to go myself or to take thee unbidden at such a time."

"I would have you know," I answered, imploring them, "that a man's life hangs by my coming to the earl without delay."

"Whose life?" they asked.

"The Earl of Cornwall's," I replied.

It was but the same story over again. I had hoped that in that quiet corner of the world, away, as it seemed, from the strife of war and policy, this man would have not seemed so terrible and so hateful as he was to most. But I was wrong, as their faces plainly showed and their words more plainly still.

"Piers Gaveston!" cried half a dozen together.

"Dominus nobiscum!" muttered the porter.

"Retro diable!" cried the sacristan; but no one stirred.

I was desperate.

"If you will not show me," I cried indignantly, "I will find a way for myself," and I tried to press past them. They hustled me and I struggled, crying shame on them the while, and soon, being younger and more nimble than these old men, I was through them and inside the gate. Seeing this, the porter hastened after me.

"Nay, sir page," he puffed, for his breath was short and his body full stout, "if you be so set upon this, get you to the abbot's house at once. I will go with you, only, unless they question you, say not who showed the way, for of a truth I love not penance, and the good father abbot is apt to be hasty at such times."

Saying this, he led the way, and showing me the door, which stood at the end of a long flagged passage, speedily fled away, and left me to knock for myself, which I did.

A voice bade me enter, and I raised the latch, to find myself, as the door swung back, confronted by two men—the one my lord, and the other a portly monk. Of a truth you might have thought the monk had donned the soldier's coat of mail, so austere did he seem beside the jolly abbot, who, they told me, was as ready at trencher as he was wise in council. But I had not much time to look at them, for De Valence addressed me with a frown.

"How now, sir page? Why this unseemly entry?" he cried.

"My lord," I answered, throwing myself at his feet, "they have taken the earl."

"Who?" he asked, in a voice of thunder.

"Guy Beauchamp of Warwick rode to the manor this forenoon, and bore Sir Piers away prisoner."

"Now, by my father's head," he cried in such fury as I had never seen him, "they shall rue this thing, which touches my honour so nearly. Father," he added, rising, "I crave your pardon if I leave. My thanks for your advice, now mayhap useless. Come, sir page."

As we rode up to the gate of the manor the household hung back. Indeed, my lord's fury had grown all the while, and as he reached the entry he, with a great voice, called on the knights and esquires by name. And as they came running to him he spoke as follows—

"Out upon you, one and all, you who have eaten at my board and called yourselves friends to De Valence, yet have held his honour so lightly as to see the man to whom his word was pledged borne off before your eyes without one word of protest, much less a blow. Things are come to a pretty pass when of all my people only one, and he the least, values his master's name enough to tell him his disgrace."

So he flung into the house, and after hearing this, as I attended him to his own chamber, I knew that, whatever others might do, the wisest head in England approved what I had done.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW GAVESTON DIED.

NEVER did man rue error more bitterly than De Valence rued this slip of his which was fated, as he too clearly saw, to work his prisoner's and his country's undoing. He had been, as I verily believe, lulled into a temporary sense of safety by the silence of others, and so it came about that they had been able to take advantage of his absence, and to bear away the man he had so carefully guarded for the past month without one single blow being struck in his defence. And it touched my lord to deem his honour slighted by the action of his friends, for though I spoke to him at once of all that Gaveston had said to me, and told how fully he acquitted his guardian of any complicity in this dire mischance, yet could not Pembroke forgive himself, or forget that but for his absence the thing had never happened, and his prisoner and his own honour stood unharmed before all the world.

But such a man is not wont to sit down to weep over the milk spilt from a broken pitcher. Scarce had he entered his own house of Deddington, than he summoned the knights of his household, and rated them in such fashion as must have made their ears tingle to

hear it, and none the less so seeing that I have never known a man less given to harsh words. Even John Chester did not escape, and in the first fury of his wrath my lord told him roundly that he was growing careless and indifferent to his master's honour, and that, should such a thing chance a second time, John should go packing with the rest. And then, without pausing to sup, he bade them arm and saddle, for De Valence would lose no time in bearding the ravishers in their den. And, though it was a moonless night, and the rain fell heavily, he set forth without delay, and all through the hours of darkness pricked on towards Warwick with the heedless energy of a man whose wounded honour had left him ill at ease.

From Deddington to Warwick is a long ride by daylight—at night it is far worse. Moreover, the others had gained a good start of us, leaving at mid-day and so reaching their own place by the fall of the short summer night. So they had a good twelve hours start of us, and when towards noon we reached the town, the earls had been, as we learned, deliberating what should be done with the man they had in their power at last. For though there were present at this time, besides the cruel Warwick, Lancaster and Arundel, perhaps the two bitterest foes that Gaveston had, yet the three of them could scarce determine on extremities which, dearly as they longed to come to them, would, as they feared, bring deadly consequences to themselves and to their friends. Ever since daybreak these three had been deep in council, inclining now to mercy, now to death, and while they could not determine there burst upon them my lord of Pembroke,

fierce with the anger of a man who deems himself but scurvily treated of his friends.

I may say at once that De Valence showed them as scant courtesy as they had shown to him and to his house the previous day. Once in the castle courtyard, he threw himself from his weary horse, and bidding his knights follow him, demanded to be led to the earls. And no man daring to gainsay him, the seneschal, on whose lips the words of welcome froze to see his high looks, forthwith conducted us—for I went with them, no man noticing me at such a time—to the hall where the three earls were striving to come to a decision regarding my poor friend's fate.

Boy as I was I could read in Lancaster's face the irresolution which had been swaying him all that morning. A word from him had ended the matter either way, for he was great enough to have outspoken the others of himself, but that word was never said. Rather did he choose now, in the moment of his triumph, as he chose after, in the day of his danger, to let the vessel drift rudderless in the storm, when the hand of a stronger man had grasped the tiller, and driven her whither he wished. And I can well see how, to one so torn by conflicting interests as he was that day, the coming of the coolest head in England seemed a very godsend, so that he welcomed De Valence as the man who should decide for them all.

"Welcome, noble Pembroke," he cried, as he saw who it was that strode with vizor raised but otherwise in the array of war through Guy Beauchamp's hall. "Welcome, thrice welcome, I say. It is a fortunate wind which has blown you hither this day."

"The wind that blew me hither, my lord," said

Pembroke, sternly, "whether fortunate or not, has wafted my wrath to seek redress for a gross outrage on my honour, and the honour of my house."

"How so, my lord?"

"Sirs, are you friends or foemen in disguise?" was the quick answer. "Had I been asked the question yesterday, I had pledged my word that to none could De Valence look with confidence more than to yourselves. And now?"

"What now?"

"Well, Lancaster, doubt holds me. Yesterday, during my absence, my prisoner, whom I am sworn to hold in safety, was taken from my house."

"You should keep better watch, De Valence," said Warwick, with a laugh.

"Watch will I keep with any man," retorted Pembroke, "when I can tell my foe. But when my friend comes, like a thief of the darkness, and robs my house by stealth, as a churl might rob a hen-roost——"

"This to me, sir earl?" cried Warwick, as his hand sought his sword.

"Ay, to you, Guy Beauchamp, or to any other man who serves me so scurvily. I say again——"

"Peace, peace, my lords!" cried Lancaster, quickly. "We are all friends here, and I hold that neither the occasion nor the subject merits such warmth."

"So may you be pleased to think," replied Pembroke; "yet I trow, had your own honour been touched as mine has been, you would think with me. I say I ask redress."

"What would you have, De Valence?"

"My prisoner in my hand again."

"Nay, that cannot be. If he is your prisoner, so

is he the prisoner of us all. You have but held him for us for a space, and now we take him from you——”

“To what end, my lord?”

But this was more than Lancaster could say, and we saw him turn first to the one and then to the other of his companions, as though he sought a word to strengthen his own. Arundel dropped his eyes to the ground, but Warwick, whose hatred burned strongest of the three, made answer.

“*Your* prisoner, as you call him, noble Pembroke,” he said, gravely, “is a traitor, whose life is forfeit to his country. He must die.”

“Sirs, are you mad?” cried Pembroke. “Lancaster, what folly is this?”

Now, as I have said, the earl had been hesitating all that morning what it were best to do. What drove him to it I know not, but on that instant he made up his mind at last.

“Warwick is right,” he said coldly. “The thing is not worth a second thought. Come, Pembroke, when we put our hands to this matter, it was not De Valence that hung back. We are agreed.”

“Even so,” said Arundel, whose voice rung hollow none the less. “We are agreed, and need but the word of our trusty comrade to set the matter in order forthwith.”

“And that word you shall never have!” exclaimed my lord. “Lancaster, have you thought of what you would purpose? Warwick, I have no less cause to hate this Gascon than yourself, yet I shrink from such a thing. Noble Arundel, lend me your suffrage, to turn these madmen from the path which means disaster for us—ay, and for the king, too—and for

our dear England. I tell you, my lords, it were better a thousandfold that you returned this man to my safe keeping to guard for you, than that you took his life. If we, who are not the appointed master of this land, can judge and do to death, whose life hereafter will be safe, think you? Are we to teach our master the road to rid him of all who dare oppose his will? Are we, with all our own sins on our heads, to send a fellow-sinner to his doom like this? Be guided by me, all of you, and save your own honour with mine."

It was easy to see that he had worked upon two at least of the three who stood opposed to him. I have said how Lancaster was ever weak of will, and too easily swayed by the last speaker, and now he stood looking moodily at the ground. Arundel turned away his head, and Warwick bit his lip for very vexation at the thought that his enemy was like to escape him after all. I believe that Pembroke would have had his way, but for a thing which happened most untoward to us all.

Even as my lord ceased speaking, the silence which followed was broken by an interruption such as no man had foreseen. I have said how we of Lord Pembroke's household had crowded into the hall. Behind us came others of the castle, so that though around the earls there was some slight space, yet in the background the crowd of those who would hear the ending of it stood thick. And as Lord Pembroke ceased, a harsh rough voice was heard behind us, raising its ill-omened cry—

"You have caught the fox," it said, "and if you let him go, look to it that you have not to catch him again."

Then, as he turned to look, we saw standing towering over the heads of the rest a tall old man, with long white hair and beard, a pale, set face, and a dozen voices cried that it was he who spoke.

“Who are you?” asked Lancaster.

“A man so old, lord earl, that I remember Earl Simon’s fall and death. He who would ride with the hounds may not hunt with the fox. Strike at the traitor, I tell you, and free our dear England from its scourge, or live to rue the day.”

And as suddenly as he had come he was gone again, nor could any ever tell whence he came or whither he went. And whether it was a trick of Gaveston’s foes, as some would have it, or a vision from another world, as many to this day believe, no man has ever learnt for certain who it was that spoke those wicked words, so lying in their prophecy (seeing how things chanced in the end), which sent Sir Piers to his death. For on the instant all hesitation seemed to vanish from Lancaster’s mind, and if anything were needed to hound him on, it was there in the plaudits of the crowd, who cried it was a voice from heaven bidding them do this devil’s work. And I verily believe that Lancaster himself was carried away by the same folly which had the commoner folk so fast, for he cried with a loud voice—

“The words are right, I know it, and they are sent to guide us to the doing of that which befits our country and ourselves. My lords, I tell you as I told De Valence not long since, that such another as this venerable man, the great Earl Henry of Lincoln, now gone to his rest, with his dying breath charged me never to rest until this fair realm of ours was free of its greatest

curse. I say the traitor dies. De Valence, let us have your suffrage, too?"

"Never, my lord! My honour demands that I should never consent to this man's death, to whom I swore to be a shield while I might. My heart tells me this is foul murder, and my head bids me stand back from a policy so fatal as this. If you are well advised, you will give Gaveston into my keeping as before, and trust to time and the good sense of our liege to mend all."

"I say he shall die!" cried Lancaster, passionately.

I think his pride was hurt, to think that any man should bid him turn aside through fear of consequences to himself. And Warwick laughed to see he was winning the game, and Arundel, though not so fierce as they were, added his consent, and so amid the cries of the commoner folk, the words went forth to those waiting outside—Gaveston should die.

My dear lord saw that it was useless trying further to stem the torrent which was bearing them away, and he gathered his cloak around him and turned to go.

"I call all men to witness," he said, "that I have no hand in this thing, which is against my honour and my conscience alike."

And, signing to us to follow him, he left the hall. But a horrible fascination had hold upon me. I must see the end. So, when my lord must needs mount in the courtyard (for the horses were still waiting by his orders) and ride moodily out of that place of violence towards the abbey, where he would rest after his wont, I stayed behind, and asked of one of those standing .

by where the prisoner was. The fellow pointed to a tower near at hand, and to this I ran, and tried to enter in.

Alas! I was too late, for even as I set foot on the stairs, which were all unguarded, seeing that the gaoler was gone up with those who had gone to summon Gaveston to his doom, I heard the fatal words of the knight who bore the message to the victim—

“Look to yourself, my lord, because you shall die this day.”

“Where are my friends?”—the voice was that of my unhappy friend. “I have no aid. Every remedy fails—the desire of the earls will come to pass!”

I was too late to speak to him, and in an agony of apprehension I drew back to await his coming forth. And while I waited I saw the earls come down the steps from the great hall and mount their horses, to await the prisoner. For not content to order his death, they looked to satiate their savage pleasure with seeing this cruel thing done. And so it was that when presently they led Gaveston forth from his prison, as he stepped into the courtyard, the first sight on which his eyes fell was that of his bitter enemies awaiting him. I do not think it can be called cowardice to long for life at such a time. The Earl of Cornwall was young and brave and accomplished and full of all those graces which adorn a life, and I scarce wonder that at this time he should have made one last effort for himself. He threw himself at the feet of his relentless judge—

“Gentle earl,” he cried, “have mercy upon me!”

But Lancaster's heart was steeled against such

weakness. He meant his enemy to die, and he turned from him with an oath.

“Take him away!” he cried. “By heaven, let him be led away!”

I wonder if, when in after years his own hour came, the proud earl thought of this day. I hope he did. For my own part—and as I verily believe there were many of those standing by who shared my feelings—I could not refrain from tears. For who could so contain himself when he beheld this gallant knight now seeking mercy at such an extremity.

But when they led him from the courtyard, as he passed amid his executioners through the gateway, there rose outside such a fiendish cry of joy from the assembled commons as might have shaken the nerve of a stronger man than he was. For the news of his death determined on had spread through the town, and the soldiery and townsfolk were come in their thousands to see the national enemy die. I say to any man it would have been a trying thing to be thus ignominiously led through that cruel, jeering crowd, but to Sir Piers, whose sickness had already brought him so low, I knew it must be a double trial. And fain would I have turned aside, but the horror of it led me forward to the end, and thinking that the chosen spot could not be far off, I went on.

But we went further than I thought for, indeed it was a good mile or more from the city where we stopped at last on a hill they call the Bledlowe, over the river on the Coventry road. And here they told the prisoner that he must die.

I can see it all now, that shameful end so savagely contrived. For the office of ending the favourite was

one which none who thought would care to take. The king's vengeance might fall full heavy on them, and this made most men chary of doing the thing. But they found two fellows, wild Welshmen who knew not the offence, and these two falling on Sir Piers, while one held his body the other struck off his head, and so he died. And then it was that there chanced that dreadful thing which I have never forgotten, and which to the hour of his fall made me dread Lancaster as I have never dreaded another man in the world. For when their foe lay dead before them—when the time had come when animosities should cease before the shadow of the grave, I with my own eyes saw that great and puissant Earl of Lancaster insult the severed head with his foot, and suffer unchecked the savage exultation of his comrade Warwick, who bore himself in this the hour of his enemy's downfall as no ignorant Paynim would have done.

It was a cruel and bloody ending to a life of promise, and it sowed the seeds of the troubles which came up among us in such thick crop within a few years of that time. I know—none better—how the people took it, how they dubbed Lancaster the “Comet of Earls,” how they worshipped the very ground on which he trod, how they believed him the greatest man that the world had seen. But I know they were wrong, I can see how it was to him we owed the dark days that followed, how in its measure this first foul slaying of a fellow-countryman for a political cause has been the forerunner of each and every execution of those which have laid so much of England's noblest blood on the sawdust of the scaffold since that day.

As for me, who was but a child and should never have been there, I turned away so sick at heart that I trow I had with difficulty regained my lord, had not a stout arm caught me and led me away. And as I walked from the place where the mob—all unthinking of what had been done—were howling their gladness over the mangled body of my dead friend, the voice of good John Chester sounded in my ears.

“Alack-a-day! what was the boy doing in such a place as this? No wonder you are over-mastered by it—’tis a cruel sight, though mayhap needful for the peace of the realm. But remember this, lad, never in the day of your prosperity so bear yourself that when trouble comes you shall lack friends. Come away now. The earl is minded so soon as he has rested man and beast to make his way home again. I trow that this day’s work has made a breach or two that will take some filling. Come, I say.”

And so I went, thinking the while how both the accomplished knight and the rough esquire had said the self-same thing, and I vowed in my heart that moment—what I have ever since striven to keep to—that never would I willingly so use my fellows that they should turn against me at my need.

CHAPTER X.

I COME TO THE KING.

I DO not think that in all my experience any event has so shaken this realm to its foundations as Piers Gaveston's death did. Many strange things have happened since that day, and far greater and more powerful lives than his have been ended by the sword, but not one has so provoked the joy or sorrow of opposing factions as did this savage murder of a gallant man. Of those who had a hand in it, Lancaster, De Bohun, and my lord the king, all in their turn came to a violent end, yet passed unnoticed from among us—their day over and their places already filled by others. But Sir Piers's death, as I have said, was wide in its effects. It raised the Earl of Lancaster to such a pinnacle of greatness as would have made one of meaner birth feel giddy; it roused in our liege the king such a desire for revenge as was not satiated till the slayer's blood had stained the doomsman's axe in turn; it filled our honest Englishmen with a joy and exultation such as little beseems a Christian people; it severed friendships of old standing, and by alienating powerful barons from the Lords Ordainers' party, so weakened the realm, that during

these sad years of division and internal strife we fell, especially in the matter of the Scottish wars, as low as the king's father of glorious memory had raised us high in his time.

I trow there were others present besides my own kind De Valence who had disapproved of what was done, but never a one of them could see how wide was the breach which was wrought by Warwick's insolence, and by the refusal of the earls to restore the prisoner to his proper keeper's charge. For when that afternoon Lord Pembroke's train rode out of the town, it was never to return, nor did the hands which had grasped in friendship, swearing fealty to each other in the nation's cause, ever again meet in like purpose. The violence of his allies had flouted Aylmer de Valence's pride and overridden his calmer wisdom, and even then there was that in his mind which was soon to lead him to withdraw from their councils, and, rather than countenance such lawless doings, to urge him to throw in his lot once again with the lawful sovereign of the realm.

We did not fare very far that afternoon, halting at an inn some few miles on our road. And here, ere he dismissed his train to their much-needed rest, the earl summoned me to his presence alone, and made me tell him again all that had chanced in those few short moments before Gaveston was seized by his foes. And after I had repeated it so far as my memory served me, he was silent for a space, and then spoke as much to himself as to me.

"Heaven knows," he said mournfully, "that I had no more cause to love this man than they had, yet would I give much if he were alive this night. It

was a murder—a cruel, treacherous murder—to do him to death in this way, and as such it will be regarded by many beside myself. But seeing that the thing is done beyond recall, it rather befits us to look at what will follow, and above all to see how this affects the king. For a great wrong has been done, and in condemning this Gaveston we have condemned the master who made him what he was. Nay, we have done more, for we have set the beginnings of a policy the end of which no man can see, for if the king be not quick to profit by the hint he gets, he is not what I know him to be. I would I saw my own course clear.”

Then, when he stopped speaking, a sudden courage took hold of me, and I drew from my bosom the packet Gaveston had given me for the king, and placed it in his hand.

“My lord,” I said, “there lies the answer to the riddle. Let those who are to blame take the hurt that must come of it, but let those who are guiltless escape.”

“What do you mean, boy?” he asked, looking curiously at me.

“Sir earl, Gaveston’s last words spoke friendship for you. If you are so minded, this matter shall come speedily to the king.”

“How so?”

“By me. I ask your permission to ride to York and to deliver this packet to him for whom it is meant. And when the king shall question me I shall know what to say, so as to bear your lordship harmless of any evil from this matter.”

He looked keenly at me for a space, and then

turned away and stood for a time in deep thought. Then he spoke again.

"You are right," he said slowly, "and it will be best ordered so. Up to a certain point I take my share of praise or blame, but of this murder I am guiltless, and I would have the king to know. Here, take your packet, and deliver it as you say. You are doing me a service which I may be able to requite to you some time."

That night I was awakened from my first sleep by a man-at-arms I knew well—a trusted servant of the earl's. This fellow, Giles Hoodman, laid his hand across my lips as he whispered—

"Rise, sir page," and for your life make no sound. The matter presses."

Outside in the darkness there stood his own horse and my palfrey, both set and caparisoned for the road.

"Mount, and away," he said in a low voice; "the sunrise must find us far from here."

I was heavy with sleep and weary from the long day's work I had gone through, but I knew that I must do as he bade me, for I saw in this some secret device of the earl. But it was weary work for me, and after we had ridden mayhap half a dozen miles my companion halted beside a great oak tree and bade me dismount.

"You are tired, Master Aubrey," he said kindly, "and seeing that we have far to ride and fast, it is as well you should not be overwrought at the outset. Here, take my cloak and your own, and lie down and rest awhile. I dare not enter a house till we are far from this."

So, while I slept, he kept his watch beside me, not seeming to know what weariness might mean for himself, hardened old soldier that he was. And when I woke the sun was high in the heavens, and I refreshed beyond my expectations, seeing what a rough couch I had had. Then he bade me eat some bread he had in his wallet, and wash it down with a draught from a fountain close at hand, and then, when we mounted a second time, I felt my strength again.

All day we rode eastward, for my companion told me that his orders, which he had taken in secrecy from the earl himself, were to strike right away from the country which was occupied by the earls, and, getting on to the coast line, so make our way through Hull to York. And so we rode as swiftly as we might, and came in time to the ancient city, which some three months before I had approached from the other side. For the great Bar, which gave admission to the town on our present road, was the Bar they call the Walmgate, which guards the road to Kingston-upon-Hull. And here Giles Hoodman bade me farewell.

"Are you not coming further, then?" I asked.

He shook his head, and being a man of few words—which, indeed, made his value with my lord—he answered—

"No. I ride to Pontefract. Give you good day, master page."

And, turning his horse round, he spurred away in the very direction from which we had just come, leaving me to enter York alone. But this way of doing it reminded me that I was a messenger, and that on me and my craft hung the future of a great house. And so, thinking how best I might obtain access to the

king, I rode slowly down the roadway and on through the gate.

Inside I asked whether the king still lodged at the castle, and they told me that he did, and to the castle I bent my steps. And here at the gate I met my first check, for the warder would not have me pass.

"What is your business, youngster?" he asked; and I replied—having thought it best to do so—that I would see the king.

"Cannot I take a message for you, my lord?" he asked, with a scoffing laugh. "We do not admit strangers here so readily. What is your pleasure with his Grace?"

"That is for his Grace's ears alone," I replied. "So let me pass, lest you come by trouble hereafter for staying me."

I said it so boldly, that he seemed a little shaken in his purpose, and even called others of the guard to look at me; and they began to make fun of me forthwith.

"I have it," said one. "The boy has heard that Gaveston is dead, and would ask the place for himself. 'Tis a good-looking sprig enough."

Thus did I learn that the news was there before me, which was like enough, seeing how far we had ridden out of our way. But I insisted yet the more that I must come to the king. But I might have gone unrewarded for all my pains, had it not chanced that an elderly knight, most richly dressed, rode up to the bridge that instant, and, seeing me sitting there on my dusty palfrey, asked what I lacked. When they told him I would see the king, he turned to me with a

merry smile, as one who pitied my ignorance, and said—

“How now, my pretty page? You ask more than any man can give you. Have you not heard how his Grace goes mourning for the Earl of Cornwall, and will see no one—nay, not even the queen herself?”

“Sir,” I replied, “I cannot help it. If you will take me with you, I will disclose enough of this matter to you to warrant me.”

“Well, there can be no harm in that,” he answered. “But I warn you I am not of his Grace’s household, but of the queen’s. However, let that pass, and let us forward. I can hear and judge for myself.”

He led me through the gateway, somewhat to the chagrin of the warders who would not have had me pass; but this knight, Sir Thomas Winterfield by name, was a great personage, who stood high in favour with the queen, and so they durst not forbid him. And riding round the great keep in which the king had his lodging, he brought me to his own place, and gave my palfrey into charge of his grooms to care for. Then he led me to his private chamber, and inquired my will.

I have ever been quick to measure men. I saw on the instant that this was not one to betray me, and so, without hesitation, I told him the pith of it.

“Sir,” I said, “I was with Gaveston when he died.”

He started at this, and asked me at once—

“How came this about?”

“I am of Lord Pembroke’s household,” I said, “and was in attendance on the unhappy earl during the last days of his life. I have a message for the king.”

"What token can you give me that this is true?" he asked.

For answer I unfastened my doublet, and showed the chain which Gaveston had thrown round my neck; and seeing this he marvelled yet the more, for it seems he and all the court knew it, for it was curiously fashioned, and had been a gift from the king himself.

"Enough," he said quickly. "You shall see his Grace, if he wills it. Give me the chain."

For the space of an hour or more I waited his return. At last he came, and bade me follow him.

"The king will see you," he said, "but woe betide you if you have deceived him or me. For his Grace goes heavily in mourning for his friend, and it is no light matter for any one to break in on such grief as his."

"Have no fear," I said.

He led me to the great keep, and up long and winding stairs, till near the very top we came at last to a small door, where he knocked. It was opened by just such another as himself, saving only that he was not so richly dressed.

"This is the boy, Sir Hugh," said my new friend.

The knight looked closely at me, and then signed to me to follow him to where, over a small door, a heavy curtain hung. This he lifted, and, knocking softly, was bidden to enter. But, instead, he signed to me to do so, merely calling over my head—

"The bōy, your Grace."

Thus did I first stand face to face with my liege, and all alone. For the king was seated on a richly cushioned chair before the darkened window, his head resting on one hand. His clothes were those of mourn-

ing, and on his imperious face were set the marks of woe, while in his other hand he held the chain I had brought with me. And yet, sad and ill in his mind as he was, there was no mistaking his being the king. For his handsome face and lordly bearing were in keeping with his high birth, and I thought then, as I have often thought since that day, how grievous a thing it was that this kingly person should cover a mind so little befitting a king.

"Come nearer, boy," he said, signing with his hand, "and tell me how you came by this chain."

"My liege," I answered, "the Earl of Cornwall hung it round my neck the day that the cruel Earl of Warwick bore him away from Deddington, saying that I was his only friend."

"And rightly," he cried, so fiercely that I shrank back,—“rightly did he say this child was then his only friend! But if there is a heaven above us, I will have such a vengeance of those who made his king who loved him seem faithless in his eyes, as shall make the murder of a brave and unhappy gentleman more famous, more remembered, in this land than all my father did. What proof have you of this beyond the chain, which you may have come by honestly or not? The proof, sir; the proof!”

I drew the packet from my bosom, and with a low obeisance laid it in his hand; and when he saw the superscription he started and looked searchingly at me. Then he asked my dagger to cut the silk, and spreading the parchment out before him read it slowly through.

And as he read, so did his wrath increase, so that as he drew near the ending of what was written, I

began to wish that my dagger had been rather in my belt than in his hand. For as he finished he sprang to his feet with a mighty oath, and poured from his lips such a flow of denunciation of those who had done this thing as made me tremble, and would I trow have made others tremble too; could they but have heard the estimation in which they stood with their king. So loud and so fierce were his cries, that the knight, Sir Hugh, knocked at the door, and asked if he were calling him. Whereupon he answered quickly that it was not so, and becoming calmer for the interruption, fell to closely questioning me concerning the matters I have already told.

That the king had loved this Gaveston I have never doubted since that day, for his anguish at much of what I had to say was sad to witness. It would seem that, though they knew of the killing of the Earl of Cornwall, they knew nothing else, and what I said was new to the king. But it was a fearful thing for me to see and listen to all that he did and said. For now he would break out into fierce denunciations of the murderers, and anon he would load me with praises for the little I had done. But of all that passed there was nothing that pleased me more than one short sentence he uttered just as I finished the telling of the scene in the hall of Warwick's castle, whence my lord had withdrawn, after protesting that this was no gear of his.

"So be it," he cried. "De Valence tried to save him, De Valence called this thing a murder, and would have none of it. Right, Sir Aylmer, when the day of reckoning comes with these cruel fiends, your king will know who spoke for right and justice, and

it shall go hard with me if you suffer by so much as a hair of your head. Go on, sir page, and let me hear the ending of it."

I told him all, and at the story of the last scene his wrath was terrible to see and hear.

"Heaven grant me the power," he screamed, "to mete out to them the mercy they have showed to my friend! If I live, and if there be the justice in heaven (which the Church would have us believe), I will so deal with them as they have dealt with this man. The slayer shall be slain, they tell us, and so will I compass it; and when proud Lancaster shall kneel at my feet and cry for mercy, as Gaveston cried to him, I will spurn him living as he spurned his victim dead, and on him will I heap those foul indignities he has dared to put upon my friend. I vow this instant that I will not spare one of the least of them for his sake."

But ere he could say more the curtain was suddenly lifted, and some one burst unbidden into the room. No rough old warrior this, but a woman, dainty, gentle, and fair to look upon, and royally clad; and, even without the jewelled diadem upon her fair head, I should have known her for the queen, then in the zenith of that lordly beauty which had caused all men at her coming to cry out that King Philip's daughter was the flower of Europe. And so she was that day, though care had since the time of her marriage sat heavy on her fair brow, and though she knew as she stood there that the plea she had come to put forward might prove, as perhaps it did, for both their young lives the parting of the ways. For she was burdened with some office which so filled her mind that I trow she scarce saw me, or passed me unheeding by, and

throwing herself upon her knees before her husband, all furious as he was with the lust of revenge and hatred, breathed out her gentler prayer.

“Edward—my liege—why have you denied me access, and let your grief for the dead beyond recall turn your heart from the living woman whose claim is first of any? Your friend is dead, and, little as I loved him living, there is none mourns the sad ending more than Isabella does. But tears cannot bring him back, or fierce menaces make his enemies feel the just resentment of their injured king. There has been a cloud between us of late. This be the lifting of it, and, laying aside your outward sorrow, do you make me your comforter, as I earned the right to be when I came to you, a bride from my distant home.”

The king raised her kindly, yet could I see that his mind was far from being set on what she said.

“You come at an evil time, madam,” he answered, gently enough; “for I have but this instant received the story of his murder from the lips of this boy, whose hand was the last to press poor Piers’s in friendship, and whose ears heard his dying requests. This is no time for softness, nor for vain regrets, but for such action as shall make these haughty barons rue the hour they dared to thwart their sovereign’s will.”

“My liege, you forget yourself in saying so much before others. This boy——”

“Is staunch enough, I warrant,” broke in the king. “Nay, more, after such horrors as he has seen and heard of late, I trow that even a king’s wrath seems tame enough.”

At this the queen’s soft eyes turned on me pitying.

"Poor child!" she said. "So young, and already cast into the stress and cruelty of war."

"Nay, madam," answered the king quickly, "if that be in your mind, it is easy enough to remedy it; nay, the cure lies to your hand. Dying, Sir Piers has written by these presents to ask my favour for this boy, who, as he tells me, is of gentle birth, and who in his last hours showed him such kindness as in him lay. He is, as you say rightly, full young to be cast into the stress of camps, then do you take him into your own household, till his riper years warrant his once again facing the world outside your sheltering aid. What say you? Living, you never loved poor Gaveston. Now he is dead, will you do this much for his friend?"

"My liege, it is enough that you should ask me, even without this bequest of the dead Earl of Cornwall, who was a brave and gallant man, ended most scurvily, I trow. The page shall join my household forthwith——"

"Then in Heaven's name, take him and be gone!" cried the king, impatiently. "Isabella, I am in no mood for your soft dalliance this day. Come to me in some happier time."

I watched her as he spoke, and methought I could see her proud lip curl with scorn to feel herself thus slighted for the empty memory of a dead man. But she knew her husband better far than I did, and rising from the chair on which she had seated herself, she motioned to me to follow her from the room.

"Come, sir page," she said, "our work is done here. We were best gone."

"Ay, go, sir page," added the king, not unkindly,

as he bent his haggard eyes upon me. "See, here, take your chain. The day may come when it will serve you better than it has served its former owner, to whom I promised a forgiveness for every link that makes its length. That, for his honour's sake, is a promise no other man shall have with it, but this I say, Be your strait never so desperate, that chain shall win you forgiveness *once* from your grateful king. Begone now, both of you."

PART II.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DARK DAYS OF ENGLAND.

THUS far in my story I have set down matters the more minutely, because I have thought the greatness of the occasions demanded that I should do so. For this business of Piers Gaveston's was, as it were, the keynote to all my life, seeing that I had left the home of my boyhood to mix in the great world, and so had longed to see its doings, and lo! unbidden they had come upon me in a horror of cruelty such as I had never dreamed of. When Queen Isabella bade me follow her from the king's cabinet it was not yet four months since the day I had waved my hand to Father Peter as I rode with John Armstrong from Dunstanburgh, and yet in that time what had I not seen and done? Twice had I stood within the very shadow of death—one soul, at least, had I sped on its sinful way. I had been sworn a rebel, and had yet entered the household of a king. I had ridden far and fast in the nation's quarrel, and seen the trouble and the labour which encircles the glories of war; had laid siege to a great fortress, and seen the surrender of the most powerful man in England, if it be power to have the king's

ear. And though it had not chanced that I should see a stricken fight, yet had I seen the far more awful spectacle of knightly blood poured out by the doomsman's sword, and had learned by sad and bitter experience that a great name does not make a true gentleman of any necessity, and that great power may be woefully misused. I say that of a truth when the kind Queen Isabella, whose fair beauty I worshipped from the first moment that I saw her, offered me the shelter of her household, I accepted it with gratitude, for so had the horrid sights and words of those evil days wrought on my boyish mind, that had the good Father Anselm stood once more at my elbow to bid me think and pause ere I preferred the harsh world of war and politics to the cloister's peace and calm, I had told him then and there that if he so willed it I would make the latter my choice, and would have turned gladly from the world, which but the other day I had longed to mix in, but which had become, through the lust and cruelty of man, so hateful to my young imagination that I would gladly have foresworn it then and there.

It was well for me that I passed into the rest and calm of the fair queen's household, for her court was the one peaceful spot in the great world of England—as yet. I say *as yet* advisedly, for the time was to come when the follies and the vices of the king were to turn the house of his consort into the centre and hotbed of the national intrigue against their lawful sovereign. And here I would record it that to my thinking a better husband had made Isabella a better wife. I am not one to seek to palliate the crimes which have so sullied the fair fame of the mistress I have ever

loved, but I declare that King Edward's wife was the last to turn against him in the realm, and that only after such studied neglect and insult as might have made a better woman the deadly enemy of the man who had used her so ill.

And now I am going at once to skip a dozen years or so of my life and to come forthwith to a later time, when, after much that was ignominious to our fair England and disgraceful to himself, the king had come at last to such power as he was ever fated to enjoy. Of the doings of those years I shall say little, either regarding the realm or myself. They were years of war and pestilence, of many affronts laid on us by the haughty Scots, of weakness wrought by divisions among ourselves. They were years moreover when, to the outward seeming, it was Lancaster and not the king who reigned over the realm, and so craftily did he dispose himself that he was not in the crowning disgrace of Bannockburn, when a handful of Scots rode down our myriads—the pride and power of England's chivalry united for the nonce against the common foe—and scattered them as a flock of sheep. Nor was he at Berwick—at least, not long enough to take blame for the futile siege, for King Edward, who seemed fated to cross him, had affronted the proud earl, and caused him to withdraw from the camp. I knew but little of what was in the doing, for by policy the queen held her court aloof from either faction; but I could guess, without their telling me, that though Piers Gaveston's murderers had wrung an outward forgiveness from the king, it was of the lips, not of the heart, and that their day of reckoning had yet to come. But I saw with gratitude that my

kind De Valence was once more high in the favour of his king, and I noted it as ominous to the hopes of Lancaster himself that in those years, when worse than any other enemy famine stalked gaunt and terrible through the land, causing the greatest lords to disband the following they could no longer feed at their tables, that more than one powerful baron had fallen away from what they called the popular cause, and that it would not need a great deal to give the king the upperhand once more.

De Valence's return to court gave me the chance of seeing much of good John Chester, who came with him as a matter of course, and who, as I grew older, did much to aid the knights of the queen's household in perfecting my skill in every warlike exercise, in which, by my mistress's own command, I was most carefully instructed against the time when I might have to carve my own way to fame. If I had a care at all it was that I, who was a man in years and an old man in thought, should be dallying in bower while I had best have done my utmost to win my spurs in camp. And as the years rolled on, while I passed from boy to man, this was a trouble ever on the increase with me. Outside the small circle in which I lived happily enough, or should have done could I but have known content, those of my growing age were bearing themselves like men and winning their reward. It pricked me at times to think that such a one had gone away no better than myself, and, coming back, could ruffle it with any belted earl among them, seeing that the sword which confers knighthood in our chivalry conveys an equality with the king himself so far as is part of knighthood's aims. And by

degrees I came to wish that I might go out in my turn, and do as they had done.

One other matter, too, sat somewhat on my conscience, though not so heavily as it would have done had I been less well placed than I was. That mysterious business of John Armstrong and his attack on me had never been cleared up, and though I often met De Valence and asked him concerning it, he, while professing all desire to serve me as he could, declared himself powerless to aid me here. Nor did I ever chance upon the monk, with whom, as I had such good reason to think, the key to the puzzle lay. For John Chester told me that, born intriguer as he was, the good monk never yet had trusted himself within reach of that fickle court where, for some past offence, there was danger to him, the king being minded to visit on his head his sins. And therein, too, lay the showing of the character of the king, who, for his private animosities, could keep his memory fresh enough, even though for our England and the honour of his kingdom he cared so little as to make it a byword among the false triumphant Scots, whom his father had kept so long under his heel.

So I was fain content myself as best I could with that which fell my way, and hope for a time to come when I should see the fulfilling of my hopes. Nor was the queen a hard task-mistress, or one that the noblest need blush to serve. Her court, which for the most part lay in York all through those years, was the one bright spot in England, and those who held the privilege of it, as I did, were envied by their fellows. Alas! to me it was in those days inglorious ease, for I was young and foolish, and would far sooner have

donned a jackman's armour and ridden to the wars in some bold baron's train, than lived amid such luxury and splendour as was the right of England's queen. Yet, had I but thought of it, I was spared the sight of many disgraceful things, the weakness of our arms, the insults of the proud Scots, the daily increasing favour which the king showed to the favourites who had taken the place of my murdered friend. Ay, in those days the words of Pembroke came true to the letter, and the removal of one minion but made room for others, to Gaveston succeeded the Speneers, and all men grew to forget even their hatred for the former, and to cry in their rage, "Why, this is worse than ever Gaveston did."

At times, when my dear mistress would ask me if I were content to serve her, and would read in my answer the discontent I had not the address to conceal, she would promise me that in the end I should lose nothing by the delay. And her words came true in a sense, for in the year of grace 1319 I gained—and I trust not unworthily or merely of her favour—the knighthood for which I longed. That was the year which followed the taking of Berwick by the Scottish king, and in it King Edward, stung at last to action by this flehing of a portion of his realm, had gone northward with a great power to lay siege to the town. And with him went Earl Thomas too, who had held aloof when Bannockburn was fought and lost, with many knights and earls of his faction, so that all men hoped the Scots in garrison would get short shrift. But, alas! it was but a hollow truce after all. The blood of Gaveston lay between the royal cousins to drown their kinder feelings, and ere many days were

past some ill-considered gibe of the king's made Lancaster withdraw. And this so weakened our English host that the king was fain raise the siege, and such was the confidence which English dissensions bred in the minds of the Scots, that they must needs dash for York that self-same year, hoping to take the person of our queen. But the manhood of Yorkshire revolted against such a thing, so much so that even the churchmen took arms, with the good archbishop at their head, and fought a battle with the invaders at Myton-on-the-Swale, where we—for I was there too with some knights and men of the queen's household—were most woefully defeated yet once again, though little to our disgrace, seeing we were but monks and boys and aged men. But on that day, which was my first stricken fight, I bore myself as a Mauleverer should, and bringing back some remnant of the forces to the shelter of the walls of York, was held to have earned my knight-hood, and by the queen's commands received it from Sir Thomas Winterfield—who had fought beside me throughout that disastrous fight, and whom when wounded I had helped from the field—on the following day. I own that it was not altogether to my liking, for I would rather have taken it from De Valence or some other approved leader, but there were others to think of besides myself, and one at least to whom my own advancement meant his bettering in turn.

How Hugh the miller's son of Lesbury learned that I was with the court I know not, for he would never tell me, but some four years after I myself had joined Queen Isabella's household, he had come to me one day, and craved my interest to have him enlisted among the men-at-arms who were attached to the

court. This I had done, and from that moment he, who loved me even as I loved him, had refused all offers of advancement from others, declaring that he waited for the day when I should need an esquire, when he would be that man. And often and again we spoke of it, and mingled our regrets that the years should thus slip by, and not a chance for me to earn that which I wished. For Hugh's sake as for my own I accepted the honour which the queen would have me take, for Hugh had told me that his father had cast him off for ever when he declared his wish to go to seek his fortune at the wars, and so we were but a pair of adventurers, who looked to better ourselves with our swords, having nothing else to look to.

And so, when I would take up the broken thread of the story of my life, it was thus with me. I was knight of the household of Queen Isabella, with Hugh Miller for my esquire, and a couple of grooms to serve us both. Poor, of course, I was, for though we lived well there was little else save honour to be gained in such a service, and that not the honour of the kind we both would rather have seen. Yet was I held to have prospered well, seeing how most others had fared in those evil days of England's disgrace, and had I been older and wiser might well have been content. But I was neither old nor wise, and would fain have thrown away the substance for the shadow of it, thinking to come by greater honour in the wars. Yet of a truth had time's passage blunted much of the anxiety which had encircled my earlier years, and I had well-nigh forgotten the attacks which had been made upon my life the year that Gaveston died. Moreover, though the horrors of the Earl of Corn-

wall's ending were still fresh in my memory—indeed they will be unforgotten while I draw breath—yet much of the doings of those romantic days had faded into the past, and I had well-nigh lost sight of the cause of my being where I was, when there came upon my life the second storm, which was to bring me closer to death than I had stood when I struggled with John Armstrong in the brook. Strangely enough, it was the hand of the dead Gaveston which led me on again, as it had guided my steps before, for what I tell now—as I told of Piers's foul undoing—is the story of the king's revenge.

But first I must relate how the Lady Alison came to court.

CHAPTER XII.

WHY I FLED FROM COURT.

WHEN a man has hangers-on to feed, it behoves him to miss none of the chances which that fickle dame Fortune offers him. I have already spoken of how King Edward took into his favour others as soon as ever poor Sir Piers was dead, and these last, two Welsh gentlemen named Spencer, out of the Western marches, father and son, were greedy in proportion to the suddenness of their rise and to their previous needs. Of all the wicked things their master did on their behalf I have not space here to tell a small portion, but suffice it to say that for long he busied himself with arranging rich wives for these unworthy minions—ay, unworthy even when set in comparison with my poor dead friend, and in getting them fat substance from the goods and lands of those who had hunted down their predecessor, and whom he slew, or banished with confiscation, as opportunity served. For King Edward the Second of that name was a merry hater, and would dissemble his real rage for years till the right time came, when he would vent his spite upon his enemies without pity and without remorse.

Now among the king's privileges in this our realm of England, there is one which finds scant favour save among the needy hangers-on of a court. It might be said of me, too, that I was such an one, but this I will never admit. I served the Lady Isabella of the love I bore her, and as my station shows this day, got little by my pains. Besides, my birth was good, and my knighthood I won fairly with the sword, so that my conscience acquits me fully of such a stain. But let that pass. The king, I say, had this privilege, that should any of the great feudal lords die leaving no heir save a daughter, the lady became his ward to dispose of in marriage as he should think fit, and so he was enabled to reward the services of the needy with honours and with broad acres too. And in the autumn of the year 1321, King Edward awoke to the fact that there was such a ward awaiting his pleasure, and sent for her to come to court. And the Lady Alison, for it was no other, was fain to obey.

This year, 1321, was the turning-point in many lives, and among them in my own. In the realm it had been the time of weighty doings, for as a cloud rises out of the sea, there had sprung up on the sudden a tiny trouble which had brought about the downfall of one faction, and the rise to power of the king. Since the dark days of Bannockburn the land had lain under Lancaster's control, and though the king had chafed and intrigued, his labour was spent in vain, and when in autumn of the year the word had gone forth from the great earl that parliament should meet at the quindene of St. Martin, few had foreseen the coming storm, which took its beginnings in a matter so small that even now I marvel that so much

should have come of so little. For though for years the great lords had flouted the authority of the king, and heaped insult on his head without any one of them coming by great harm, yet a paltry quarrel between two women overthrew the most powerful man in England.

This was the matter in brief. The lady of one Badlesmere shut the doors of her husband's castle of Leeds (hard by Maidstone) in Queen Isabella's face, saying that while Sir Bartholomew her lord was absent, no stranger should set feet within her gates, and in a trice the fat was in the fire. The Lady Isabella was riding with a slender train, of whom I was one, on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint Thomas at Canterbury, and this business which began so peacefully ended in war, and in the making of yet another saint of that name. For when the news of the insult reached the king, he showed a proper spirit, saying they might insult himself, but that no one should flaunt refusals in his wife's face, and calling upon all who thought as he did to follow him, he swiftly laid siege to the castle, and since he could not very well punish the lady, hanged all the men about her instead.

Now this Badlesmere was of the faction of the earls, and men marvelled to see Lancaster come pricking among the first to his cousin's aid. Of the harm he took by this there was no end, for while the other barons would have it that he had betrayed one of his friends to please the king, the commons of England were no less displeased, crying that he was a poor friend to the people who, cousin or no cousin, could march with the tyrant to avenge an insult to his order.

And the end of it all was this, that almost at a stroke three-quarters of the earl's great popularity was gone, which has often made me think since that day how strange a thing it was that when he did evil it brought him power and popularity, but when he did that which every knightly feeling bade him do, he came by much loss. For the foul murder of Gaveston made him the ruler of England for a space of a dozen years: the bringing to her senses of an uncourtly termagant who had insulted his queen, cost him his power and his life as well. But so it was.

For myself many years had passed since I bade him farewell that day at Pontefract when first I saw him, and I had grown out of all recognition, yet it seemed as if he remembered me well. For when I, being pleased to find my old patron so ready to march to my dear lady's aid, went to pay my duty to him, he received me most kindly, and saying many handsome things of me, expressed his pleasure to learn how well I had prospered, and declared himself my friend. And when at last he dismissed me, he spoke certain words of promise which I was fated to recall ere many weeks had passed.

Well, that matter being ended with the hanging of eight or ten honest knights, who were to my thinking only blameworthy in that they served a man who had a vixen for a wife, we of the queen's household returned to London, where our lady was minded that Christmas should be spent. And no sooner were we come thither than the Lady Alison arrived to await the pleasure of the king, who was pretending to weigh the rival merits of the scum who thronged his court, till he could decide who was to honour the heiress

with his hand. For the lady was in this strange position, that whereas she should of right have come by her inheritance some years before, the king had been pleased (for services rendered and money lent in Piers Gaveston's time) to grant to her mother's brother—that very Simon de Maurepart whom I had met in Saint Mary's Abbey in York—the lordship over his niece's lands till his death, when they were to come to the rightful owner. So, as he said, with one of his laughs which were more dangerous than an honest man's frown, there was ample time to spare, unless Sir Simon's poor health should end him indeed. For it was the joke of the court that this Baron de Maurepart, who had been most richly rewarded for what was a trifling service at best, had so little stomach for the wars and factions of the time, that whenever he was asked to join one side or other with the great body of foreign mercenaries who fed at his table, he would say the leech forebade his stirring by reason of his weak health, which health (to do him justice) did not prevent his striking out most stoutly if any tried to do him or his lands despite.

What shall I say of the Lady Alison's coming, which, on the instant, turned the whole current of my life. Perhaps if I were to confess that in a small case of soft leather which hung round my neck there lay two relics, one the chain Sir Piers had given me, the other a certain kerchief thrown to me by a disdainful little lady who had pitied me once on a time, the truth will be understood. Through all those years I had cherished the guerdon, and as I set spear in rest to charge the false Scots that fatal day at Myton-on-the-Swale it lay next my heart, and brought me for-

tune, as I had always meant it should. Yet, till the coming of the lady to court, I had never met her, and had well-nigh forgotten her very name, and had been far too shy to ask of any of the scoffers around me who she was and whether I was like to meet her again. And now on the sudden, by King Edward's whim, she was under the same roof with me once more.

Yet, when I looked at her, and saw her moving with all the courtly grace of our high-bred English dames among the ladies in the queen's bower, it all came back to me in a way, though of the little lady I had spoken too in the old monk's garden but a trace remained. For this new-comer was so grave and stately, and oh, so fair, that while my poor heart went out to her I felt that between us lay a distance which it would be hard indeed for me to bridge.

This is a tale of war and policy, and in setting forth the doings of my early life I would not waste the time which should be devoted to the doings of men with dallyings in any lady's bower. Yet, as there was that in what chanced during these next few days and weeks that exercised a great influence on the share I took in the war that followed, I must of necessity set down what befell me after the Lady Alison came to court. The ruin of my freedom came swiftly. About the queen in those days there were few but grey-beards, for (as I have said before) in her conduct as a queen, a wife, a mother, there was at that time nothing to bring her shame. But I who had grown from page to esquire, and from esquire to knight in the household, was a privileged exception to the rule, and enjoying the full favour of my royal mistress, was free of her bower, free to meet and to converse with the

noble damsels in her train, at almost every hour of the day. There is in these things a fate which regulates our doings with or without our leave. I had grown from boy to man among the fairest dames and damsels in England, without ever so much as a whisper in the court speaking of my having fallen captive to the charms of this or that beauty. Yet when this lady came the freedom of twelve years was gone in as many days—gone never to return.

It is a great while since that time, but I can well call to mind the agony of change through which I passed, my mood shifting from day to day. At first there was the sudden recognition, confirmed by what the others told me of Sir Simon (for now the matter was the talk of all the court), and of the cause that brought the lady there. And then there followed the last struggling of sense against the glamour, and then hope that I might do as well as others had done—others with far less pride of birth than I could boast—though all the while, to do me justice, it was the lady I looked for and not her lands. And then despair, to think how wild a dream it was for one so poor and powerless as I was to aspire to the hand of this rich heiress. In fine this coming to court of the girl for whom I had borne my romantic affection through that long term of years, in a trice had made me feel those potent impulses of the weak human heart, hope, love, and, worst of all, despair.

Yet I would be cunning through it all, and vowed that no man or maiden should guess my secret. It was this—the desire not to seem to wish to avoid my love—which brought me daily to her side, at least I thought so then. And for her part, though she would hold me

aloof, as was only in keeping with her stately nature, I do not know that it greatly displeased her to have at her call the youngest and not the least courtly of Queen Isabella's knights. Those were times too when we found such opportunities as might not have come to us at another season of the year, for it was Christmas-tide, when the court was full of gaieties, and revels were held almost every night. And through it all I was ever at my love's side, speaking to her, or looking at her, but never—for I loved to hug my secret—telling of that former meeting of ours beside the swift-flowing Ouse, of which all memory had seemingly faded from her mind.

But if I flattered myself that my secret was unnoticed I was wrong. One pair of eyes at least had seen it, and those of no less a person than the queen herself. Perhaps for aught I know she may have designed some such thing for me, for she was ever my friend, perhaps it was only her woman's wit which scented out the affair. Be that as it may, on the night of the Feast of the Epiphany, which the vulgar call Twelfthnight, she drew me aside and spoke of the matter.

"A man who is no laggard in war, Sir Aubrey," quoth she, without introduction, "should be no laggard in love. Look to it that your dallying does not let the bird out of the net."

"I do not take your Grace's meaning," I stammered.

"Oh yes, you do," she answered, with a laugh, "I have seen it all along. Come, Sir Aubrey, and what if I, too, were minded to show my lord the king that I can make matches as well as he can himself? If your queen should tell you where to bestow your hand, would you say her nay?"

"Your Grace," I answered bluntly, "love is an holy thing. All that I have to give was given years ago." And then I told her the tale of our meeting, Alison's and mine beside the river in York. Whereat she laughed, and then grew grave.

"I will see to it, Sir Aubrey," she said; "that is, if the lady be willing. What does she say?"

"By my faith I never asked her," I answered, and thereupon she laughed.

"There is no time like the present, Sir Aubrey," she said. "Hand me to the dais, I pray of you."

I did as I was bid, and when she dismissed me, with a meaning look, I was not slow to profit by her advice. I think that night I was half-mad with excitement, and I sought the Lady Alison, who was sitting apart, and (as I thought) somewhat sad of face, and determined that ere I left her I would know her mind, and hoped that if it were at one with my own, we could look to the kindness of the queen to smooth our road.

"Lady," I said, as I seated myself beside her, "you are strangely sober to-night."

She turned upon me the beautiful eyes which had already gone so often through and through my poor heart, as she answered with the very ghost of a smile—

"And so must they be who think of the future, and of the past."

"Nay, lady, that need not be," I said, with a merry laugh, "for I, too, have been thinking of both past and future, and yet can bear to smile. My memory has been playing pranks with me this night, and has carried me back to the time of Piers Gaveston's death, which, perchance, you scarce remember?"

"I remember it well enough," she said with inter-

est. "I have good cause to remember it, for that was the year my uncle took me from the convent where I had passed so many happy years since my father's death (for my mother I never knew), and brought me to the house he had usurped. What do you know of that year, Sir Aubrey?"

"I am thinking," I answered, "of the day when the earls with Lancaster rode into York pursuing the king. I call to mind that Lord Pembroke rested that night at the abbey of Saint Mary, outside the city walls. There was a page in his train who chanced to help a certain damsel to fish out of the river, which flowed along the orchard, a fat mastiff puppy——"

"It was Bevys—my dear Bevys," she cried, "whom I left the other day at home because I thought he was grown too old to turn courtier. Yes, I left him, and broke his heart I fear, and perhaps my own. And were you that page, Sir Aubrey?"

"Even so. And see, lady, how the turn of the wheel has brought us together again, when nothing seemed less likely. Well might I think of the past this night, and something of the future, the pleasure of which depends so much on you."

"On me?" she asked in surprise.

"Ay, on you. Lady, for all these years I have worn your image in my heart. The future lies in your hands. If you will——"

But ere the words were spoken there was a great cry almost at my elbow: "The king—room for his Grace!"

And as the chamberlain, with key and chain, backed bowing before him, King Edward walked with stately tread towards the dais, leaning the while

on the arm of a stranger to the court. They had to pass so close to us that I could almost have touched the king with my outstretched hand, and he, though he cared but little for the beauty of any maiden in the land, was caught by the new face beside me, and, doffing his bonnet, asked whom he might welcome to his consort's court.

"My niece, your Grace," said the man on whose arm he was leaning, and in the dark and evil face I recognized the man whose strange behaviour at the abbey had so struck me at the time.

"My fair ward," said the king, bowing again. "I trust they make you as happy as such beauty deserves. But remember that a court has its dangers as well as its pleasures—a thing Sir Aubrey de Mauleverer would be wise to bear in mind, I trow."

And bending on me one of those false smiles which I knew by this to be far more hurtful to a man's chances of peace than any other's frown, he passed on. But his work was done—his and his false companion's, for upon us both there had fallen in that instant the shadow of ill fortune. As for my question, it was never answered, because it was never put, for presently the queen withdrew, taking her ladies with her, and I, not caring for the rougher revels which were to follow for the men and the serving-wenches, went in my turn.

It was, if I remember rightly, late in the afternoon of the following day that my old friend Sir Thomas Winterfield sought me out.

"Sir Aubrey," quoth he, "I am the bearer of a message from her Grace. It is short enough for me to remember it word for word. 'Tell the knight,' she

said, 'that it will be well for him if he will dismiss from his mind the matter of which we were speaking yestereve.' That is all."

"And enough too!" I burst out, glad to unburden my heart of a little of the deadness which had been weighing on it all that day. "Her Grace is pleased to be merry at my expense."

But he cut me short.

"I am not in her Grace's counsels," he answered very gravely; "and I know not what this matter is which lies between you twain. But if an old man who is your friend might offer you advice, you will regard this warning, and one which, rumour has it, you have already had from the king, and not hazard your liberty——"

"My liberty? And has it come to that already?" I asked.

"Nay, I said not so. Only, those who cross the lion's path are wont to come to harm. So fare thee well, Sir Aubrey," and he was gone.

Throughout that afternoon, or what was left of it, I kept my own chamber, fuming with rage. It had all chanced so evilly for me, that coming of the king, and of Alison's uncle. Nay, I did not even know if the risk that I was ready enough to run was warranted by a return of love on my dear lady's part. But as I fumed and fretted, eating out my heart to think how I was fenced and caged, there came to me Hugh Miller, bearing a message written by some one whose writing was strange to me.

But if the writing was strange to me the words were stranger, and brought but cold comfort to one

who had been hearing such things as I had since the previous night.

“If you be wise,” it said, “you will go hence with what haste you may. An enemy hath spoken to the king to tell him that you would mate higher than be-seems your fortune. The reed bends and straightens when the storm is over and past, the oak is uprooted and laid low. There be those that would see you destroyed, and others who would grieve at your undoing for the sake of a fickle jade, who laughs at you. Of the truth of these my tidings you may assure yourself if you fear not the risk ; but away, away ; haste and away !”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE STRANGER ON THE ROAD.

Now when I had finished reading this letter—not without some pain, for the writing was crabbed, as were the words themselves—I looked across at Hugh.

“Who gave you this?” I asked.

“A stranger,” he answered. “A man I met outside in the City.”

“In the City!” I exclaimed. “Yet is it a matter which has to do with the court? Said the fellow anything besides?”

“Not one word. ‘You serve Sir Aubrey de Mauleverer?’ he asked. ‘I do,’ I answered. ‘Then if you would see him prosper, give him this letter;’ and before my surprise was ended he was gone.”

“And what think you of the matter?”

“Nay,” he replied, “you are forgetting. I know nothing of what the writing would convey.”

It was useless my giving it to him, for he could not read it. Shrewd and clever as he was, he had never learned so much as that. But I read it to him, and he looked grave.

“I had guessed this was coming,” he said.

“How could you do that?”

“Last night at the revels I was standing near two of the king’s household, and heard what they were saying to each other. Quoth the first, ‘Yonder cockerel struts bravely,’ to which the second made answer, ‘Ay, but the day is coming when his wings will be clipped. I have it from one who heard the king himself promise as much.’ Then they both laughed, and I saw that it was you of whom they spoke, Sir Aubrey.”

It was some few moments ere I could answer him, so dumfounded was I by this further confirmation of the warnings I had already received. But I had great faith in Hugh’s strong sense, and I had no hesitation in asking his advice, knowing it would be freely given me, and that with the best wish to serve me.

“Hugh,” I cried, “what shall I do?”

And his answer surprised me, for he caught up his cap and made as if to leave the room.

“I will answer that for you within an hour’s space,” he said; and I was left alone with my sad thoughts.

It was more than an hour before Hugh returned to me, and I spent the interval communing with my own sad self. I felt that the ending of it must be my withdrawing from the court for a time, but whether with permission or in secret must depend on how close the pursuers were upon my track. And where to go to? I had not a friend in the world—stay, though, there was always Earl Thomas, and his promise to serve me; and, after all, dearly as I loved my kind mistress, there was little that I owed to the king. If he were minded to do me an injury, I should be safer nowhere than with his powerful cousin, and to him I could go if only—what? If only my heart had not been so heavy with the sorrow to know that Alison would never be

mine. She was cut off from me doubly, by her own wish and by the king's command, and there was nothing left for me to do but to wander out into the world alone. In my despair I felt that I would rather go across the seas.

I was roused from my gloomy reverie by Hugh's return, breathless and armed from cap to toe. Nay, more, in his arms he bore my mail, which he made ready for me to don.

"Hasten, Sir Aubrey," he cried, "there is not a moment to lose. I should have been here this half-hour since, but that I could not find the armourer who had your mail. I have told Dickon to saddle our horses, and to have them in readiness in the street by the river, and we may yet get away, though I fear the lost time may be hard to make up."

"But why this hurry, Hugh?" I asked.

"There is an order given to lodge you in prison this very night; and but that they think you unsuspecting, it would have been carried out ere now. Luckily, the knight who has it thinks he may as well sup first at the king's table, and so we gain a paltry start. Let us make the most of it."

"But how," I asked, as with his aid I donned my mail, "did you learn this?"

"Too long a tale, and too unsafe to tell you here, Sir Aubrey," he answered. "Suffice it, that I have heard this thing was brewing, and have kept good watch in your interest. I have my friends in useful places, just as you have foes, Sir Knight."

"Foes! Who can they be? I have done no man wrong."

"So you think. Yet some one has told me—nay,

it was yourself—of a certain jackman who came from no man knew whence, and would have ended you ten years ago, had not you been readier than he. And who put you on your guard that time?”

“Yourself, my trusted Hugh.”

“Then act and talk not,” was his answer, as he threw my cloak over my shining armour, and cast his eye around the room to see if there was anything we ought to take. But he only picked up the coffer—slenderly provided enough—in which I kept the few gold pieces I had saved, and the letter, which last he thrust into my hand.

“Away, Sir Aubrey. To the road!” he cried; and I was fain obey.

It was just falling dusk as we slipped across the courtyard and out of the great gates into the deserted street outside. Nay, more than the coming darkness, there was a thick mist of fine rain falling which served to hide us from observation. To the sentinel’s challenge at the gate my esquire answered readily enough, “Despatches for the West,” and he lowered his pike and let us pass; for those were peaceful times, and the guard over the king’s person was not like the watch they kept at Pontefract. In a few minutes we had found the groom Dickon with our two horses, and telling him we rode forth on business to the City we mounted, and were gone from the palace and the risks it held.

“Do you take the lead, Hugh,” I said. “I am well content to leave the ordering of it all in your hands, since you were ready for this thing and I was not.”

He led me out towards the west, so that for some

miles we followed the Windsor road. And then he struck southwards, and presently coming to a ferry over the Thames, we crossed the river, and followed its other bank back in the very direction from which we had come.

"Whither away, Hugh?" I asked, when after several hours riding I found that we were only drawing near to London again.

"I was for the East coast," he replied, "hoping that they would never think of looking for you there, and that by hard riding we might come to the North again. Up near the Scottish border the king's writ does not run, Sir Aubrey, and you and I are near at home."

"Nay, then," I answered, for the matter had been in my mind all through the long ride, "no North for me. Go you home, if you will do so, kind Hugh, but for my own part I will ride out of this realm and beyond the power of its perjured king. I go to France."

"To France?" he queried. "Nay, that were a wild throw indeed. And yet—why, if it come to that, Sir Knight, there is no country in Christendom in which a couple of trusty swords are not welcome, and I doubt not that the French king has his troubles like our own. Fare we to France if you will have it so."

"Nay, not *we*, Hugh; *I* will go alone. Go you to our dear Northumberland and to your own home."

"I have but one home, Sir Aubrey," he answered stoutly, "and that is the place where you may chance to be. Would you have me hie me back to my good father like a prodigal returning, to turn miller, as he bade me, and be content to watch the mill's sails go round? No, thanking your worship, Hugh is not for

that this day. To France if you will it, or the devil, or anywhere, so long as it is *we*."

My heart was too full that moment to do more than grasp the honest fellow's hand, which I did. And so we rode forward till towards dawn we came to a small roadside inn on the road to Rochester, where we determined to rest both men and beasts. Nor were we disturbed, for they had not, as had been possible, raised against us the hue and cry. Indeed, there was no sign of any pursuit.

Late in the afternoon we sallied forth again, meaning to make Rochester our resting-place that night. And towards nightfall we drew near to the city, where something chanced which altered all our plans.

In a lonely part of the road we came suddenly within earshot of sundry sounds of strife, and cries for aid, and pricking forward found a single traveller set upon by a half-dozen or so of footpads. He was a stout fellow too, for, with his back against a wall that bordered the road where some sort of building must once have stood, he was keeping them at bay with his long broadsword. Prettier play I never saw, yet it was evident that the odds were too many—one single arm must tire ere six did. But we had come on the instant, and setting lance in rest, Hugh and I rode down upon the assailants, scattering them like sheep, with three left dead or sorely stricken on the ground. The others fled, while the unknown, resting on his sword, tried to get back the breath he had wasted in the *mêlée*. I had jumped down to aid him, if it should be that he had taken hurt at their hands, but, guessing my purpose, he courteously waved me back.

"I thought, Sir Knight," he said, in gasping sen-

tences, but with a Scottish accent strongly marked, "that you Englishmen boasted of your orderly ways. Yet here, close to your London, and within a stone's cast of a walled city, a peaceable traveller can be set on by ruffians, I see. But none the less I owe you my thanks for a most timely rescue. But for your coming it must have gone hard with me soon."

"I trust you have taken no hurt?" I said.

"Not a scratch, and once I have gotten my breath shall be as well as ever, and ready to pursue my way to the sea. I wish, sirs, that you were going thither, for by Saint Andrew, I have little stomach for a lonely walk with such rascals as those dogging my steps."

"Are you also for the sea?" I asked.

"Even so. I am a peaceable trader, concerned in my lawful business, and would fain to my ship which lies in the Thames, waiting for my coming to put to sea."

Now, though he called himself a trader, I did not believe him. He was no master of woolpacks, as I could see. So I thought that perhaps he might serve me in this matter of my escape, and determined to try him.

"Nay, it matters little," said I, "where I put to sea, so long as it be soon. I was minded to sail from Walmer or Dover or one of the southern ports; but the Thames would serve as well, provided I knew whither you were bound. We can pay for the service, and can guard you as well on your road, good trader."

"Now out upon you for a braggart!" he cried fiercely. "Angus Douglas trusts no man's sword except his own. How do I not know that you may be leagued with some other band, and only minded to

lead me into further trouble? Go your ways, and let me go mine."

And to my surprise, before ever I could frame a word, it was Hugh Miller that spoke.

"Nay, Sir Angus," he said quietly, "that were a poor way of requiting a service. On the Northumbrian border we should look for better of the Black Douglas's cousin than that."

The other turned on him in surprise.

"Whoever you are," he said, "you know me, and since you hold my name, you hold my life as well. What would you?"

"No harm to you, Sir Knight," was Hugh's reply. "But we are in trouble, fleeing the country, in fact, having fallen under displeasure of the king. In such a strait we should help you, and why will not you help us?"

"Now, by Saint Andrew," exclaimed the stranger testily, "why did not you say as much at first, and save talking?"

"Because," I said (rather craftily as I thought), "I did not care to trust a woolpack with secrets fit only for knightly ears."

"My hand upon it but you are right, whoever you are," he said heartily. "And if a passage to the north in the cleanest craft that ever sailed from Leith is any use to you, it is yours, with my promise to set you ashore anywhere on the coast as I go."

But on hearing whither he was bound, I was minded to draw back.

"My thanks to you, Sir Angus," I said; "but that may not be. I am for France, wishing to reach a foreign shore."

"And what is Scotland, pray?" he asked. "Thanks to our own stout arms, we own no English king now."

"And even if you did not care to go to Scotland, Sir Aubrey," put in my trusty Hugh, "why not fare to our own Northumberland? This is a chance we may not come by easily again."

I thought a moment while they waited; and then, seeing that fate had settled the matter for me, I was fain to admit as much.

"Have it your own way, Hugh," I said. "And my thanks to you, Sir Angus, for your courtesy. You said just now your head was in danger here if you were known. I am little better off, and so we can accept your kindness without demur."

"That is right," he cried heartily. "With luck, to-morrow's sunset shall find us both beyond pursuit. Let us to Gravesend forthwith, whither I was bound when set upon, and there I can find you a friend and countryman of my own to give you a fair price for those two horses, which you cannot very well take north with you on this cruise. But first let me ask who my passengers will be."

"My name," I answered, "is Aubrey de Mauleverer."

And as I spoke, even in that poor light, I could see him start.

"It is not the first time we have met, Sir Aubrey," he said gravely. "But I may be forgiven for not knowing you again, seeing you were younger in those days. And this, I take it, is your esquire?"

"It is even so; Hugh Miller——"

"The miller's son of Lesbury," he cried. "No wonder you know me, sirrah. Well met, both of you;

and now I know that you are trustworthy, having the same interest of danger to keep you honest, let us away."

It was some hours gone into the night when we reached Gravesend, where Sir Angus led us to a private haunt of his own, where a man might lie hid for a lifetime without a soul suspecting where he was. And it was as well for us all that it was so, for we found to our sorrow that the vessel which our companion had expected was not come—afraid, perhaps, to venture so near the enemy. And for a whole month we lay hid there, chafing sadly at the delay. For though we dared not venture forth, there were plenty to tell us of what was happening in the outer world, and we learned how the king was gathering a great power to march against the rebel earls, which made me more than ever anxious to get away. And at last they brought us tidings that we might venture forth, for, in this press of war in the West and Midlands, the watch kept on the Scottish vessels was not so close as before. And so one day in February, over a month since I had fled from court, we dropped down the river in a boat to find our ship awaiting us in the mouth of the Thames. And so I started for the North.

It had been arranged between us that Hugh and I should be landed somewhere on the Northumbrian coast, as chance might serve. And so on the morning of the fourth day after leaving Gravesend we came to the spot. I would sooner far have been put ashore on the Yorkshire coast, nearer to Pontefract, to make my way straight to the earls; but this Sir Angus forbade, saying he dared not risk his ship so near the king's

harbour at Kingston-upon-Hull. So I was fain to allow myself to be carried further north than was to my liking.

Sir Angus told me that he hoped to land me at Craster on the evening of the fourth day, and that we might even find some fisherman to take us from the vessel without their putting in too close to the shore. And on the morning of the day when we were to land, while the vessel was sailing merrily northward under a favouring wind, he drew me aside, and spoke of matters he had never touched on as yet in all the long talks we had had together.

"Sir Aubrey," said he, "would you care to know the reason why you were hunted out of court the other day?"

"And what do you know of it?" I asked.

He laughed as he answered.

"It is my business to know many things," he answered; "and, above all, to make myself master of the concerns of those with whom I travel. While we lay wasting our time at Gravesend, I made it my business to ask a few questions of those who could tell me concerning your matter. You were over-ready to run away, Sir Knight."

"How so?" I asked.

"You let yourself be misled by a carefully contrived plot. You got a letter the day before you left, unless I am misinformed?"

"The day I left," I said.

"And who do you think wrote it?" he asked next.

"I would give a good deal to know!" I cried.

"Sir Simon de Maurepart," he said.

For a moment I could not answer.

"I am betrayed," I said.

"Exactly," he answered, with a short laugh. "And had you been more versed in the ways of the world you would have guessed it, and stood your ground. There was no danger to any one, least of all to you, in your marrying where your heart was given—not even to this Maurepart, only he is as blinded by hatred as you are by love. His best policy were to marry his niece to one who, as you can, can afford to wait. If one of the king's people gets her, I will not give you a groat for Sir Simon's chance of holding the lands for a month. They will soon trump up something against him, and he has no friends."

"So I have heard," I said.

"Yes, and it was there that your inexperience crept out. You had all in your favour, did you but know it—the promise of the queen, Piers Gaveston's token, the favour of the lady——"

"Of that we need not speak!" I cried hotly, for I had forgotten who it was had called her fickle.

"There you wrong her," he answered. "She is yours, if it can be so ordered. Why, she had believed you made away with by her uncle, and was for asking the king's permission to seek rest in the cloister, till I had her told privily where you were."

"And there was no plot to imprison me?"

"There was a plot to make you think you were to suffer imprisonment—and I fear it succeeded," he said.

"Sir Angus," I answered earnestly, "you have, indeed, shown yourself my friend. Why is it?"

"Do you remember," he answered, "a certain summer evening, some fifteen years ago, when

a lad swam the Coquet to Warkworth Hermitage——”

“I have it now!” I cried. “You were the Scottish stranger. But why——”

“You shall know no more at present,” he said, cutting my question short.

CHAPTER XIV.

OF DUNSTANBOROUGH HEAD.

I SPENT much of that morning with this good hearted Scot—for so he was without a doubt—and would fain have asked many things of him. But though he was ready enough to speak to me of general matters, of my private concerns he would have no more, at all events so far as the past was in question. When we came to speak of the immediate future—and I was ready enough to seek the counsel of one who had already doubly shown himself my friend—he spoke out freely, asking me how I was minded to act.

“Well may you ask me,” I answered without hesitation; “that is just what lies heavy on me now, and ever since you told me how I was frightened from my strong ground by a phantom. What would you have me do now?”

He thought a moment.

“Sir Aubrey,” said he presently, “if I am open with you, will you keep my confidences locked in your own bosom?”

“Ah, that will I do, by my knightly faith!” I replied.

"Well, then, I will make a rebel and a traitor of you forthwith," he said, with a short laugh. "I went south myself to try to hold communication with some of our Scottish prisoners in ward at Rochester Castle, and also to find out for myself in what light the country holds the Earl of Lancaster and his friends."

"But how?" I asked in some surprise, "does this affect you?"

"More closely than you would suppose. We think, we, that is, across the border, that the time is at hand when we shall have our full revenge for the insults heaped on us for years by the king's father."

"And was not Bannockburn revenge enough?" I asked hotly.

"Nay, for in truth by that great victory your English power was but scotched, not killed. If Scotland is to be safe, Sir Aubrey, we must so reduce your means of hurting us that——"

"This to me—an Englishman and loyal subject of King Edward's?" I cried.

"Nay, nay!" he said quite coolly. "Here on the open sea we can forget for the moment the hedge that lies between us, and each for a space bear with the other. Besides, Sir Aubrey, if the humbling of King Edward's pride be un-English it were strange indeed, seeing how many honest Englishmen are bent upon it at this time."

"Name only one," I answered.

"Earl Thomas himself."

"Out upon you, Sir Knight. The earl is well able to do it of himself, without your Scottish aid, which his own sense must lead him to reject."

"Mayhap," he said, so meaningly that I began to

doubt the honesty of the earl from that hour. "But we were speaking of you. Your country is on the verge of civil war, the king against the barons. Choose you your faction—unless, indeed, you wish to stand aside."

I saw it on the instant, and knew that, having turned my back upon the king, there was nothing for it but to join the others. Perhaps I was over-ripe for treason then, smarting under the sense of injury received at the hands of the king.

"That being so, my mind is easily made up," I answered stoutly. "Lancaster was the first friend I had. Now, when he calls his friends around him, I too may answer the summons without hurt to my honour."

"A wise resolve, Sir Knight, but how to do it? We are far from Pontefract here. You should have landed below."

"That is your fault," I said; "but it is no great thing to remedy it. A ten days' ride will bring me south again, I trow."

"Hardly," he said gravely. "The earls have marched ere this for the west."

"Do you know everything?" I exclaimed.

"Only what concerns me and my friends," he said coolly. "But listen, Sir Aubrey. Are you minded to do me a further service?"

"Of what sort?"

"Well, if you be really minded to go to the earl, I have a letter for him which I cannot trust to better hands than yours."

For a moment I hesitated, for the charge was a perilous one, and if caught red-handed carrying mes-

sages between the powerful rebel and the Scots, a short shrift and a long rope would be my portion. He saw my difficulty, and spoke at once.

"Nay, if you mislike the charge," quoth he, "there let the matter end. I can find others to risk it."

But the thought that I should seem a poltroon in his eyes made me decide to do even as he wished.

"Give me the letter," I cried.

"I will give it you when we part," he said with a smile, "that will be time enough; and since you are ready to be my messenger, perhaps you will be as ready to take a leaf out of my book for the nonce."

"How so, sir?"

"Avoid the roads, and keep to the sea, as I do. What better or freer way could a man find, when he is minded to travel fast and safe? Go to the village of Craster—— Nay though, I have a better plan. You shall see it this night, for it will be nightfall ere we reach your home."

He left me shortly after this, and though Hugh Miller came to me presently and would have talked with me, I dismissed him, for I wanted to be alone to think over all the strange things which I had heard. In the south at court I had heard men at times speak of the chances of the great earl's allying himself to the false Scots—for at that time I had not come to know them as I do now, and all the nation of my father's murderers were false to me—but no one believed in such a thing, and least of all did I, who owed too much to Lancaster to wish to see him a traitor to the nation as well as to the king. And yet, as I sat on the deck and watched the blue coast line slipping past us all that afternoon, I could not but believe that it might

be so—nay more, that I myself was about to become the messenger of treason. For to Lancaster I meant to go, as offering the only chance to me in my own country, now that by my own over-haste I had shut myself out from the court. Perhaps it was full half despair, for I believed that I had parted for ever from my love; and, with the desperation of a young hot-headed man who is thwarted in a matter near his heart, I hoped to find a soldier's death fighting for England's freedom with the earls.

As the dusk came down, by Sir Angus's orders they brought a great iron cresset on deck, and in this they lighted a fire. And then was seen a notable thing, for the Scottish knight with his own hands threw on the flames some substances which changed their colour, burning now red, now green, now blue, and now again a pure white light. Nor was it long before I learned his meaning, for from the shore some miles ahead of us there came an answering glare, and just as ours changed colour, so did theirs. At the same time, pointing to a long low strip of land which lay landwards, my companion asked me if I knew where we were.

"Nay, if that were Dunstanborough Head itself I could not know it from this side," I answered.

"It is Coquet Isle," he replied. "See, there is the glimmer of the light the hermit burns to warn the shipping. The lights on the shore beyond it are those of the village at the mouth of the Alne."

"And the others that burn like yours?" I asked.

"Are Bulmer lights, I expect, signalling on to Craster that we are here, and need a boat to meet us. Ere this, I trow, the sturdy fishermen of Craster are putting out to sea—look! That red flash three times

repeated means that it is so. In an hour's time, or less, you will be met."

And so it happened, for as we sailed onwards, out of the darkness ahead there shone a signal, which was that of a vessel sent from Craster to us. And when he saw it, Sir Angus Douglas told me to prepare, as she would be alongside us in a very brief space.

"Here is my packet, Sir Aubrey," he said, and placed it in my hands.

"It is very heavy," I exclaimed.

"Yes, it is well weighted with lead, so that if mischance overtake you on the water, a fling of the arm will put it beyond the reach of prying eyes for ever. Fare you well, Sir Knight."

"Nay, may we meet again in happier circumstances," said I.

"More like with vizor barred and lance in rest," he answered. "You do not love my people, and you have good cause. Perhaps some day your song may alter."

And then he turned and hailed the approaching craft with a mighty shout. Across the silent waters came an answering voice, in the true rolling tones of my dear Northumberland that I loved so well, and very speedily the two ships were close side by side, and some of the others, dropping into a smaller boat they had in tow, pulled across to where we lay.

As their leader clambered up the side, I knew the man, John of Craster they called him, a notorious character of the place. It was long since I had seen him, but there was no room for mistake, even had not Sir Angus greeted him by name.

"Well met, my worthy Jock," he said; "I

have a couple of passengers here for you to set ashore."

"Well met, Sir Angus, and none the less so, seeing that, had you come to-morrow in place of to-day some other had answered your signal."

"How so?"

"I am for Withernsea or Hull to-morrow, with sundry messengers for the earl."

"How go things here, John?"

"Famously. They are striving night and day, and I trow we shall be ready ere my lord shall come."

"Well, here is one who may be an old friend of yours, seeing he passed his childhood in Embleton."

The fellow doffed his cap as he saw he was addressing a knight, but as he cast his eyes over me, where I stood in the full glare of the light thrown by the great cresset, he shook his head.

"Mayhap," he said; "but he is a stranger for all that. By what name shall I call you, sir?"

"It is Sir Aubrey de Mauleverer," said the Scot.

"Yet am I none the wiser," was the answer. "Stay though, there was an imp of a page of that name here years ago, but some one told me he had either turned courtier, or was dead, or come to a bad end in some other way."

"Nay, it is the same."

"Then what is he doing here?" he asked suspiciously.

"He is taking despatches to the earl from you ken who," was the answer; "and there will be no harm done if you can find a corner for him in your ship to-morrow."

"That will I gladly, if he be going to the earl," he

answered with alacrity; "but we are dallying. Have you any further commands for me, Sir Knight?"

Sir Angus thought a minute.

"None," he said, "except that you guard my friend here as you would myself."

And the fellow readily swore he would. Then Sir Angus grasped my hand with a true friendly warmth, and bade me go, and in a brief space I was trying in the darkness to wave a farewell to my new friend from the deck of John of Craster's ship.

It did not hurt my standing with these rough fellows to find that I had with me as an esquire one of themselves—for Hugh, it seems, knew every one of them right well. But I was inclined for silence and the darkness, and sat beside the steersman—John himself, in fact—wrapped in my cloak and looking out across the dark waters at the shore which I had not seen since I left it a child so many years before. But presently as we ran before a favouring wind I sighted a great blaze of lights upon the beach, and asked my companion whether that was not Craster, and why he was minded to pass it by.

"That is not Craster," he answered; "it is Dunstanborough."

"What?" I cried. "All that great light? And what are they doing there with a blaze like that on a barren headland?"

"You have been away some years, I see," he remarked dryly, as he looked at me. "But you will soon learn for yourself. I have a message or two to deliver, and they will put me ashore here presently, and you too if you be so minded."

I thanked him, and sat there watching the lights

which danced upon the beach, growing ever more and more distinct as we drew nearer. It was clear that they were some of them mere torches, others great bonfires; but for the life of me I could not imagine what they were doing there. And by the time that the vessel was hove-to some hundred and fifty yards or so from the shore, I could make out great dark lines standing out against the sky, and numberless figures as of men passing at random from place to place, looking at that distance like so many ants.

Hugh begged to accompany me, and our guide raising no objections, I gave him leave. But as a couple of sturdy fishermen pulled our small craft towards the shore, I grew more and more excited, as did Hugh. For now there was no mistaking the purport of the dancing and the lights—for the figures on the shore were busy men.

I knew that we could not hope to land on the point near the Rumbel Kern, but I was not a little surprised when we headed for another spot a couple of hundred yards or so to the southward, and presently ran up a little creek or channel fashioned by human hands, which certainly had not been there when I was there before. But the wonder caused by this was as nothing to what I felt when I saw towering high above me the turret which flanked a mighty wall, that stretched away till it was lost in the darkness inland. And before us, right along the shore, from this haven to which we were come to where I judged the Rumbel Kern must be, there was a great wall rising, too, before our very eyes, under the labour of Heaven knows how many willing hands.

“Hugh,” I said, half awe-struck to see such a

strange thing happening in that lonely spot, "it was full time that you and I came back."

"It was," he said. "I trow I shall never feed sheep on Dunstanborough again."

And as he said it, the giant beside him broke into a hearty laugh.

"That you will not, Hugh Miller," he cried. "Ship oars, my lads—gently, my hearties. Ashore there—a rope."

"Is that you, John Craster?" asked a voice I thought I knew.

"Even so."

"And whom have you with you?"

"Passengers from the south."

"Is it so? Then they must see the governor at once."

"Where is he, Thomas Colson?"

And I started to hear spoken again, after so long a time, the name of the man who had so narrowly escaped hanging on my account.

"Yonder by the bonfire. We shall need all the light if this is to be got through."

"The wall goes merrily, good Thomas."

"Two feet this very day. We shall be ready by the coming of the earl."

"And when will that be?"

"In Heaven's good time."

Then John Craster turned to me, and gave me his arm to lean on, of which I was glad, for the rocks were slippery with seaweed, and I was stiff with sitting in a cramped boat, and cumbered with my mail.

"Welcome to Dunstanborough *Castle*, Sir Aubrey de Mauleverer," quoth he; and, catching my name,

the esquire, Thomas Colson, thrust the torch he held towards me.

“Who did you say? Nay, is it the little lad that saved my life when the earl was full minded to hang me?”

“The same, kind Thomas, grown a bit with years.”

“Your servant, Sir Knight, and, as John Craster says, ‘Welcome to Dunstanborough Castle,’ which is like to be the strongest in the north.”

And it was even so, though I could scarce believe my eyes and ears. For the moon, coming through the clouds at that instant, and the night being crisp and like to turn frosty, I could see from where I stood what a wondrous change these last few years had wrought. When I went away from the home of my childhood this had been a bare bleak down, and now, as if by magic, there was risen a keep and gateway, and a chapel, and a vast circling wall, with towers and turrets galore. But what struck me as most wonderful was to stand and look down from the green above the shore upon the wall designed to protect the new castle from the side of the sea, which, under (as it seemed) myriads of willing hands, was growing before my very eyes. And as if to tell the haste and the need of the moment, the very materials themselves stood out in relief, for close to where I stood were great heaps of rough, round stones, untrimmed and just as they had been left battered and worn by the sea that wrought them to their present shape, which whole troops of labourers were bringing in from the shore, and which were meant to take the place of the dressed stones masons more regularly use. These, sunk in great beds of mortar, which others were mixing ready

for use, were to form a rough and ready wall, not perchance so elegant as one might wish to see, but good for its purpose, and strong enough to stand against the assaults of either an enemy's battering rams or the even more destructive hand of Father Time.

It was a wonderful and a beautiful sight, and one I shall never forget. The men, who were there in hundreds in obedience to the orders sent by Lancaster that his new castle—for which he had only within a year or two wrung permission to build it from the king—was to be ready to form the rallying point of his faction in the north within the shortest possible space of time. And Thomas Colson told me that since those orders came the work had been in progress night and day, and troops of the labourers and men-at-arms from the earl's and Lord Percy's estates were working in gangs to get it done. They had no time to wait for the dressing of their stones by the masons, but by a happy inspiration had seized upon the materials thrown up for their use by the waves, and were now, as a last precaution, throwing up this mighty wall to seaward, to guard what they hoped would prove the strongest castle in the north from a descent by sea. It was a wonderful sight, I say, those dark figures flitting in and out among the great bonfires and the torches, each man in his own place, and all working without confusion to the common end.

Colson led me to Sir William Touchet, who was for the time governor for the earl of this new stronghold, which bade fair to transcend in importance to the faction of the earls the mighty Pontefract itself. I had not known the knight before, but he welcomed me very cordially when he learned who I was and whither

bound; and as he turned aside, with a courteous apology for leaving me, as he had to attend to his duties, remarked—

“You can tell the earl, Sir Aubrey, how we carry out his orders in the north. Within a week that wall will be ready to stand the assault of any foe that comes.”

Hugh had vanished for the nonce, and I, on learning from my guide, John Craster, that it would be well for us to rest within the castle walls that night, and to join him at about ten of the clock the following morning in his fishing village, turned aside to walk the round of these new walls and buildings. It was, as I found, for the present a mere shell, but a shell of prodigious strength, only lacking time and money to make it a mighty fortress indeed. And now, grown wiser by the experience I had known, I could see how the ground helped the design, for to the northward the hill sloped so steeply as to be a good protection in itself, and to the south they had raised a great wall flanked by buttresses and towers. And so in time, following my round, I came to that spot over the bay where the cliff rises so high and so precipitous that nothing save a bird could force an entry; and here the circling wall had ceased for the time, and the sea wall lay some little distance below. This was the place which I had known so well long years before, the spot they called the Rumbel Kern.

Coming back to the scenes of a childhood is always awesome, I think, and doubly so is it when the memory recalls only solitude and silence, and when revisited the whole place rings with life, and with the preparations for the stern realities of war. For the moment

I was glad that Hugh had not come with me, I preferred to be alone, and then scarce had the thought crossed my brain, when my solitude was broken in upon.

"Well, Aubrey de Mauleverer," said a voice, almost at my elbow, "what think you now of the great world you were so anxious to see more of when a boy?"

I turned with a start, and my eyes fell at once upon the tall slim figure of a monk. There was enough of light from the fires and torches to show me that he was a venerable man, for his snow-white beard stretched to his girdle, and his face was thin and white. But his figure was as yet erect enough as he stood there leaning on his palmer's staff, and in the attitude there was nothing of weariness, but rather expectation of what I should say. And even as I looked I knew who it was, and that thus strangely at last Father Anselm and I stood once more face to face.

"The world has not used me so ill," I said, "that I shall complain of it."

"What brings you here?" he asked.

Perhaps to any other I had suggested that that was no concern of his, but in my eyes this monk stood in another light.

"Father," I said, "I fled from the court, and would fain come to Lancaster."

"Fool, thrice a fool you are!" he cried bitterly. "There you would have ridden safe through the storm—here you may go with the rest. Tell me it all without concealment. How did you lose the favour of the king?"

I told him all I thought would interest him, and

to my surprise he put to me many questions, showing that he knew of my doings all through these years. And when I was finished, I put a question in turn.

"Reverend sir," said I, "I have looked to this meeting for nigh fifteen years, since I understand that you, and you alone, can tell me the mystery that shrouds my birth."

He looked sadly at me.

"There is no mystery," he said. "You are the son of a poor knight who met his death——"

"All that I know," I answered impatiently. "But who was my father?"

"I have just told you."

"And will say no more?"

"I have nothing to tell."

"Then let me put it another way. What cause has any one to seek my life, and why does Simon de Maurepart hate me as he does?"

This time he showed me I had struck home, for he started. But that was all I gained. His face grew stern, and he shook his hand warningly towards me.

"Boy," said he, "be warned in time. Neither strive to pry into the past, nor mix yourself up in these evil doings of this evil time."

"What do you mean?" I asked; and his answer startled me, indeed.

"There is a great disaster coming upon the earls," he said. "I have foreseen it for this long time, and know it to be so. Lancaster's favour with the people is gone, and so is his skill, and for the rest—who are left? All that were wisest and best of his friends are with the king, and of those that remain with the earl

some are foolhardy, and others at heart traitors to the cause they pretend to serve. Have nothing to say to them, I bid you."

"But," said I, "how am I to know that it is you that I should trust?"

He frowned, and it was fully the space of a minute before he would answer me.

"Boy," he said, "do you doubt me?"

"Why should I do otherwise?" I asked. "Have you ever shown such an interest in me that I should believe you unquestioningly now?"

"What interest do you lack?"

"Why," I said boldly, "I have known for years that you alone can solve for me the riddle which, however much you may deny it, I know to be connected with my birth, and with the attacks made on my life. Many men have told me to look to you—some of them great nobles who do not mislead their friends who trust them. Yet in all these years I have seen you but once before. Then, perhaps, you were well advised to keep back from a boy what it could scarce benefit him to know, but now it is not so. Why should I trust you, Sir Monk, I ask?"

"You will rue it if you do not," he said gravely.

"Mayhap," I answered, affecting a carelessness I certainly did not feel. And then a thought struck me. "Come," I said. "A bargain with you to take it, or to leave it, as you list. Tell me this mystery, and I will shape my ends to your liking."

But he shook his head by way of answer.

"Hot blood makes youthful folly, sirrah," said he; "I will have no bargains. Go your own way, and live to rue it, if you must. You would not be a true

Mauleverer if you trusted the word of any man who sought to advise you well."

And drawing his cowl around his head, he strode away, leaving me speechless and unhappy. For of a truth I was young enough still to be scared by the shadow of an unknown evil hanging over my head.

CHAPTER XV.

HOW A WILFUL MAN HAD HIS WAY.

Now, if this had been to me a memorable day from its surprises, the night was more memorable still, and from a very different cause. It was then I had my first and only quarrel with Hugh Miller, by boy-hood's friend.

By the kindness of the governor a small chamber had been allotted to us two for that night over the guardhouse in the great gateway, and thither, after I had broken my long fast, I retired, to get me ready for rest so soon as Hugh should come. My vigil was a long one, and when at last I heard the well-known footsteps mounting the winding stairs, they came deliberately, and not as a man should walk who knows he is full late. And so soon as my eyes fell on Hugh's face I read there the signs of coming trouble.

"Hugh," I cried, "where have you been this three hours gone?"

"Attending to your matters, Sir Aubrey," he answered. And then, letting the truth out with a burst, he added, "Sir Aubrey, you must forego this journey to-morrow."

"Must is a hard word, Hugh," said I, "and one

that you should not use, except the matter be more urgent than I take it to be."

Whereon he fell to long excuses, and to much talk of the risks I should assuredly run, and so to the business I had already heard, how no good would come of this rebellion in which every man of us must perish, and so on, till in truth I lost my temper.

"Enough, enough!" I cried; "it is just that half-mad monk over again."

"Half-mad or not, Sir Aubrey," he answered, "he loves you well, and therefore merits better words. Besides he is skilled in policy and——"

"Peace, Hugh!" I replied, striving to keep cool; "you will not shake my resolution any more than he could. I marvel that himself having failed he should try to work upon my fears through you."

"Sir Aubrey, have you any doubt that I wish you well?"

"None," I answered.

"Or that your honour is no less dear to me than to yourself?"

"I well believe it."

"Then, by the love and friendship which has grown up between us, increasing with advancing years, I conjure you to stay where you are. What loss can come of it, I ask you? Here you are in your own home, whither you would most naturally come when retiring from the court for a space. If the earls shall be successful, you are at Dunstanborough; if the king gain the mastery, you are far from Pontefract. For once listen to my words, and trim your sails to suit the coming storm."

"Impossible!" I cried; "my word is passed."

"Who to?"

"Sir Angus Douglas."

"Than whom no worse firebrand treads the Border. It were enough that he advised you to go, to make you pause. And when, moreover, Father Anselm——"

"Why should I trust the one more than the other?" I asked. "The first time I saw either they were in company, and for no good, I trow."

"Sir Aubrey, hear me this once."

"Hear Father Anselm you should say."

"All the more reason."

"Not to my thinking. Were I myself a shaveling I might say amen to that; but, since the matter lies between a soldier and a monk, I follow my own trade. Let us rest while we may. I start at dawn for the south."

"And nothing will stay you?"

"Nothing."

He turned away.

"Sir Aubrey," he said presently, "I have followed you for years as faithfully as any dog follows his master the shepherd; but to this war I will not go."

I suppose his words nettled me, for I spoke more sharply than my wont.

"Please yourself, Hugh. Save your own skin, if you want to. Your not going will halve my anxiety, and rid me of a troublesome councillor as well. Go I must, even if it be alone."

"The monk was right," he muttered half to my hearing, half to himself. "He said you were mad with your own folly. Well, for the present, fare thee well, Sir Aubrey. Our roads lie apart, it seems."

And he turned and ran from the room. For a

moment I stood thunderstruck, for I had never thought he meant it, but was, after his wont, trying to have his own way. But this seemed ominous, and I ran after him in my turn.

"Hugh," I cried, "come back! Come back, I say!"

But the echo of his footsteps was dying away, and when I reached the bottom of the staircase he was nowhere in sight. Even then I hoped he was not in earnest, and, returning to my chamber, lay me down to sleep, for I was worn out with fatigue.

But the morning brought no Hugh. I did not like to seem to miss him, but pretended we were to meet at the ship. Yet when I got there he was nowhere to be seen, and presently John Craster, after asking if I expected him, cast off.

I pretended to be most interested in the castle as we put out to sea. For we got a fine view of the southern wall and the mighty gateway (than which, to my thinking, few finer exist) as we left the land. John Craster told me how Earl Thomas had wrung the leave to build it from the reluctant king, who doubtless thought that Pontefract was enough trouble without raising such another stronghold in the distant North. Until the present time the work had been going slowly on, but now the order had come to finish the outer defences at speed, to shelter the following of the earls if things went ill with them in Yorkshire. For, as the seaman said with pride, the place was strong in itself and easy to provision from the sea, if only the stout Northumbrian fisherfolk were on one's side, and in such a place the army of the rebels might hold out for ever. And I thought so too.

Yet all the time there was a chill on my heart, for Hugh's desertion had cut me more deeply than I cared to show. It was an evil omen for this enterprise, and what followed bore it out. For never, I trow, did a more disastrous voyage come to those who would fain have hurried than came to us this time. For the weather, which had been favourable enough as we came from the south with Sir Angus, changed on the sudden, and so beset us, that not only did we make little progress, but nothing save the skill of stout John Craster saved our lives, and we were driven by the tempest so far northward that it was only after much labour and beating against head winds, that some ten days after starting they could set me ashore on English soil, and that some four or five days' journey north of the spot whence we had started. For ashore I would go, and none forbade me; even John Craster himself, with all his faith in his gallant craft, declaring that after such an untoward experience no man but a braggart would promise to land me near Pontefract within any given time. But he came ashore with me close to Bamborough, and led me inland to the little town of Belford, where I bought a horse, and sorely fuming at the delay, and not a little anxious at the risks I ran, set out for the south. It was then but a few days short of the month of March, and I had left London some eight weeks before.

A most perilous journey I had, and rode with my life in my hand the whole way. I dared not go direct, for the whole country was up, and men were mustering on every side, some for the earls and some for the king. It was no time to stop and ask questions; indeed, I dared not seem too curious, and moreover was

forced to avoid all company, lest my true mission should betray itself to some chance foe. And so, threading my way with caution, and avoiding all places where I was likely to be stopped, I came at last on the night of the 9th of March to the castle of Leeds, which, being held by Earl Thomas, was, I thought, sure to shelter his friends.

And here, although all risk to myself was ended, my true anxieties began. For strange indeed were the tidings I got here from John de Mowbray, who had been with the earls. It seems that even while I was trying to come northward, Lancaster had raised the standard of revolt, chiefly as it seemed for fear that the king's gathering powers in the west country should overwhelm him before he could crush the head of the opposition to the supremacy which had stood almost unquestioned for a dozen years or more. But neither the luck nor the skill of the rebel had been what they were before, and on every side the friends of the king had dared to oppose the man who had been the king's master since the fatal days of Bannockburn. For marching southward to get into the west and crush the king ere he grew too mighty to be set, they had turned aside to reduce the king's castle of Tickhill, near Doncaster, which was held for the sovereign by the Constable de Anne. This brave Sir William had laughed in their faces when they bade him surrender, and had held out so successfully that the rebel leaders were fain to divide their forces, a portion under the gallant De Bohun (who was still faithful to the fortunes of his lifelong friend) continuing the blockade, while the rest, under Lancaster's own orders, had marched to Burton-on-Trent, to hold the

passage of the river against the king, who was advancing at the head of a great army out of Wales.

Of course such news as this made me doubly anxious to press on to the south. So the next morning I rode forward, and towards noontide was far beyond Pontefract—where I had not turned aside—and nigh to the village of Darrington, when I beheld the whole of the hollow roadway below me, which they call the great North Road, filled with a disorderly rabble of soldiery. And when I pressed forward to learn what it might mean, to my surprise I saw displayed the banner of Clifford, who I knew to be with the army of the earls. Then, seeing they were friends, I pressed on, and accosting a young knight whom I chanced to know, Sir Reginald de Langton, I asked him what it meant.

“It means,” he answered sullenly, “that we are running away.”

“We?” I queried.

“Ay, Lancaster and Hereford, and De Lisle and Touchet, and a host of less degree, are running like a flock of sheep.”

“Sir Reginald,” I said aghast, “this is a sorry jest.”

“Jest? There is no jest in it. It is as I tell you.”

“But where are the earls, and whither are you all bound?”

“The earls are where they list,” he answered sullenly, “and as for the place we go to, it is Pontefract to-night, just as it was Doncaster yesterday, and Tick-hill the night before. Where it may be to-morrow the craven spirit of panic may tell you, for I dare not even hazard a guess.”

"I will ride with you," said I sorrowfully, "seeing that it is to Pontefract that you are bound. And as we go tell me more of this."

"What do you know already?" he asked; and I told him how I had heard of their start for Burton-on-the-Trent, where I had looked to find them, if indeed the king were not already beaten.

"The king beaten?" he cried with a sorry laugh. "It is all the other way. It is our side that is beaten, and that without striking a blow, Sir Aubrey. You have heard how that thrice-accursed Sir William de Anne (though why I should curse a gallant man for doing his duty I know not) held out against us for the space of near a month, and how we moved southwards to hold the passage of the Trent. We got the bridge, and there for four whole days we lay facing the king, who, with a mighty army, came so soon as we ourselves were there. The word had gone forth for all our friends to come to join us, but no man stirred, though every day we heard, nay, with our own eyes could see, the coming of fresh succours to the king. We told our leader that we were safe enough, for the river was in great flood and the bridge we held the only one for miles. But on the fifth day, without warning, the word went forth that we must retreat, and so it is that we, a gallant army, strongly posted, and led by Lancaster, turned tail and fled."

"Lancaster? Fled?" I gasped.

"Ay, Lancaster fled, for the rest of us did but his bidding. I say again, and I care not who may hear me, that it is this craven earl alone that brings us here."

"But surely," I urged, "he had good reason for such a thing?"

"Reason? Your coward ever had a dozen. Some say it was the king finding a ford, others that he had heard that De Hollande, who was pledged to join us with all his following, had gone instead to the king. What care I for his reasons? All I know is that he fled, and we after him, without a blow struck for our honour, like a pack of beaten curs."

I could not answer him, so full of wonder was I to hear the once great earl spoken of in this fashion. So I rode by his side to Pontefract, and there, after I had given my good horse to a groom to tend for me, stood watching the coming of the army, which but a short month earlier had gone from that very spot so full of hope. And everywhere I read in the soldiers' faces the same story of a sullen discontent with the trick fortune had played them, though even yet they hoped the cloud would pass away. Alas! it was not to be so. The great earl's star was set for ever.

And presently, from where I stood on the battlement, I saw three come riding whom I knew. In the centre was Lancaster himself, tall and erect as ever, but his hair sprinkled with grey and his face lined with care. He wore the hunted look of the prey which feels the pursuers at his heels, and much of the regal confidence which had marked his bearing when I saw him in that very place before was gone, and on his countenance was stamped the look which ever sits upon the face of the man who knows and feels that he has shot his bolt and failed.

On his right rode Hereford, the same as ever, gallant and gay and careless, and hardly showing a sign of increased years. Him, too, I knew, as I had cause to, for it had been his hand which snatched me from

the cruel Warwick, who would have stabbed me in the chamber in the great keep. I did not see much change in the brave Constable of England, and yet ever and again, as he cast a rapid side glance at his leader, his face would cloud, and his cheerfulness desert him for the moment, so that he became well-nigh as gloomy as his two companions.

For the baron who rode on the earl's left was a man of a dark and lowering countenance. I could see that Clifford (for it was he) was brooding, and not in the chastened spirit of the earl. His face, too, was proud and haughty, and when his glance rested for a moment on his companion, his lip would curl with a bitter scorn, which I, much as I wished well to my childhood's benefactor, could have brooked less had I thought it less deserved.

They passed from my sight, and I descended to mingle with the crowd, who waited to hear what should be determined as regarded the movements of the beaten army on the following day. And still, even within the strong walls of that peerless fortress did vacillation seem to sway their counsels, for when the darkness set in they were still debating, and no man seemed to be able to get at the truth.

It was to me, who had only once before been in the castle, and that in the days of its owner's pride, when there were gathered around his board in hall or council the flower of England's nobility, sad indeed to see the minished state and the lack of order which prevailed among the beaten and disheartened host that night. There was little in the fierce scramble for food in the great hall to remind me of the stately banquet where, as a page, I had stood beside Lancas-

ter's chair, and could almost without moving have laid my hand upon the half of the princes of the blood royal. Where were they and the gallant array of earls who had banded together to destroy Gaveston, their common foe? Well might I ask, and take for answer the moaning of the March wind among the towers and turrets of that mighty pile. For some, like the gay Clare, Earl of Gloucester and brother-in-law of King Edward, had met their death at Bannockburn, and others, as my own kind De Valence, Earl of Pembroke, had forsaken the faction which had stained its hands with murder, and now rode beside their king. Suffice it to say that they were not there, and all was changed, even the Comet of Earls himself, from whose nerveless hands was fast slipping the leading staff he no longer had the skill or courage to wield.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DARK DAY IN PONTEFRACT.

THOUGH I would fain have had speech of the earl that very night, I found the thing impossible on more grounds than one. To begin with, the leaders of this disheartened host—already more than half beaten ere a single blow was struck—sat far into the night taking counsel what should be their next attempt. Then, too, I bore that in my bosom, which made me cautious how I pressed unduly for an interview, for not only was it apparent to me that many of those who pretended to follow the lead of Lancaster were sadly suspicious of his acts, but I knew that there were plenty who would regard it treason to hold any traffic with the Scots, and they, too, not of the king's following, so embittered were men's minds against the national foe. So I was fain hold my peace for the time, and on the morrow I had my reward, for the earl, who had heard of my coming, sent for me of his own will to come and see him in his own chamber—that same room which I had such good cause to remember on account of what had chanced there fifteen years before.

I found my former patron alone. He was seated

in the great chair beside the fireplace, in which a pile of logs burned brightly, listlessly turning over some papers which lay strewn around him. And now that I could see him closer and without any covering on his head, I knew that what I had thought on the previous day was true, and that, even in these few months that had passed since last we met, he was sadly aged by misfortune, and by the anxieties that beset him. Yet did he welcome me most kindly, asking the business that had brought me there.

I told him in as few words as I could how I had fled the court to avoid imprisonment by order of the king, and had come to him to claim the protection and favour he had promised me. Whereat he raised his head, and, looking me full in the face, asked what I would have of him.

"The king has wronged me unjustly," I answered. "I appeal for justice to the barons of England."

"The barons of England?" he questioned bitterly. "And where are they, Sir Knight? Time was when they were content to march with Lancaster, and to honour his guidance and advice. But you are too late, Sir Aubrey. If you would ask aught of the barons of England, you must seek them where the king is."

"Nay, lord earl," I replied, "that may not be. Even if for the moment they are not with you, the cloud is but a passing one begotten of to-day. To-morrow they will be flocking to your side again."

He shook his head mournfully.

"Not so, Sir Aubrey. Mine is a falling cause, and men love not to bolster up the fortunes of one whose star is set."

“If gratitude——” I began.

“Gratitude?” he echoed, cutting me short. “You must not seek it here. Gratitude needs favours to feed it, and those who ride with Thomas Plantagenet to-day must look for their reward in hard blows taken in a falling cause.”

“Well, be it so,” I answered. “And if you speak sooth, my lord, who should draw sword more readily for Lancaster than the man whose boyhood he sheltered? I have but one life to give, but that is freely yours, if Heaven so order the matter as you say.”

The words were spoken on the moment from the fulness of my heart, for it cut me deeply to see this great lord, whom I had known in the days when his word ruled England, fallen so low. But I was glad I said it, when I saw his eye brighten and the colour mount to his pale cheek as he grasped my hand with a mighty grip.

“Now, by my father’s head, Sir Aubrey,” he cried, “you would make a man of me again! Of a truth things have gone so hardly with me of late, that I was minded to see you turn on your heel, as others, who owe far more to me than you do, have already done. Think what you say. My good cousin the king is in a forgiving mood just now, and welcomes all and sundry who will gird at me. It is the fashion to be at court these days.”

“A fig for the fashion!” I answered. “I am ready to risk something more for the right—indeed have risked a little as it is.”

And deeming this a fitting moment to quit me of my commission from the Scottish knight, I drew from my bosom the packet and laid it in his hand.

I watched him as with his dagger he cut the silk that bound it and slowly mastered its contents. And then, as he finished, I saw an angry flush mount to his forehead, and he crushed the paper in his hand and turned on me like an outraged lion might turn.

"'Odds fish!" he cried in a voice of thunder, "how came you by this, sirrah?"

"I had it of a Scottish knight—Sir Angus Douglas——"

"And since when have you consorted with the false Scots?" he cried again. "I had deemed myself the better of an honest man's aid, Sir Aubrey, but this snacks more nearly of foul treason than I care for."

"Naught know I of treason, lord earl," I answered, as steadily as I could. "I saved the knight's life, and in return he gave me passage in his ship to the north, and asked me, seeing I was coming to you, to bring this letter. He told me of no treason, though he said that there was danger——"

"Danger!" he cried as angrily as before, "I should think there was danger in it! Know that I hanged a knight of twice your worth but a year since for this very thing, and you stand prating to me there of danger as if your own neck did not stand nearer the stretching than ever it stood at the hands of my cousin the king."

"Hang me, if it pleases you, lord earl," I answered coolly, though I was angry too. "And if this is the way you greet those that would serve you, I marvel not that your following is somewhat shrunk this day."

For an instant he glared at me as though he were minded to take me at my word. Then his face softened, and he cast the paper into the fire.

"I will believe you innocent, Sir Aubrey," he said, as we stood watching the letter shrivelling in the flames. "But remember this, that for all that men may tell you, Thomas Plantagenet is not yet fallen so low that he would sell his country's honour for all the paltry aid the Scots could give him. Would it were in my power to treat them all as I do their message, which is an insult to a true man, as I will die, so help me God!"

His words often came back to me in after days, when men would have it he was in league with the enemies of England, which I know to be as false as many other things said of him when he was gone. But at that time, even as we stood silent, watching the flames destroy the evidence of why I had come, the door was gently opened, and Humphry de Bohun craved admission to his friend.

"It will go hard with me, kind Hereford," said Lancaster, in answer to the appeal, "when my own true comrade asks for me and is bidden to turn aside. What would you with me now?"

"I am from the council," was the answer. "They would know your mind."

As for a moment Lancaster hesitated I had time to look at the last of the Lords Ordainers who followed the falling fortunes of their chief. And my heart leaped as I saw how high the gallant Constable of England bore himself, and how in his flashing eye and confident bearing there was no sign of the weakness which was consuming his brother earl. But there was little time for thinking, since Lancaster was speaking, and what he said had all my attention.

"To my mind," he answered slowly, "there is but

one reply. It is true that three things are open to us: first, to go south again and meet the king——”

“Who blocks every passage on a road it will never serve us to take,” retorted Hereford, with a laugh. “What is your second plan, my lord?”

“To face him here in Pontefract—a place of strength——”

“So strong that it will be harder to get out than in,” said the other, good-humouredly interrupting him a second time. “I have no mind to stand here to be caught like a rat in a hole.”

“You forget, Hereford,” was the proud answer, “it is of Pontefract we speak. There is no man living that can take the castle by assault, and we are well provisioned for a siege, which will give time for my vassals, who are stretched from sea to sea, to muster to my aid——”

“Even as that foul caitiff De Hollande did, my lord,” was the reply, spoken more gravely. “If he, with all his promises on his lips, could ride to join the king, whom can we look to with certainty? The example is contagious, Lancaster, for treason was ever a fashionable play. Give me your third plan, ere we decide.”

“Nay, if it come to that, the plan is none of mine, but Clifford’s, who, as I believe, aims to succeed to my leadership, seeing he would shape my policy as it is. *He* would go north to Dunstanborough, *he*——”

But even while I started to hear the place mentioned which I had so recently seen, and while the knowledge of the true reason of the hasty building of that mighty fortress was still undigested on my mind, Hereford was ready with his reply.

“And wherein is he wrong, lord earl? The far north were the place for us, I trow. There they love Lancaster and hate the king, whose weakly handling of the Scots has so deeply hurt them. There, too, you have a place of strength, unfettered by this York, which holds out for the king, and even while it shelters all that thwart you, hangs on your flank as a slenth-hound hangs on a red deer. To the north the king scarce dare follow——”

“A moment, Hereford. What know we of this Dunstanborough, save that it has been built full hastily because I ordered it? It may be——”

“Nay, there, my lords,” I cried, being unable to contain myself longer, for I thought that De Bohun was right, “I can say something. I have been there within the month, and I can answer for it, that while to the landward it is well protected, it rests upon the sea, and the sea is held for Lancaster by the stont fisherfolk, who will never let the castle starve. Within its walls——”

“Well spoken, sir, whoever you are!” cried Hereford. “Now, Lancaster, you hear?”

“I only hear my own conscience, Humphry, and that tells me I am right. I say I will not fare northward, to please you all, but here in my own home will stand and face the king.”

“And who will tell the others?” asked De Bohun, whose face fell vastly as he knew that his leader had determined at last.

“I—and do you two attend me. Sir Aubrey, my cloak; Hereford, your arm, which I trow will be at my side, whatever chance. Let us——”

But ere he finished there smote plainly on our ears

the sound of mailed heels clattering upon the stone staircase of the tower, and in an instant there burst into the room a score of knights and barons, with the cruel Clifford at their head. Again did I recall how it had chanced in that very room before, but whereas then these men, or some of them, had come to ask their trusted leader's leave to advance against the foe, I felt they came in different guise this day. For in their flushed and angry faces and their lowering mien I read the truth, that they were come not to ask another's orders, but to demand the carrying out of their headstrong will.

It was Clifford, a man whom I had ever disliked, who was the leader and the spokesman of the rest. It was he who strode up to his nominal chief and faced him without one vestige of the respect due to his position or rank.

"Your answer, sir earl!" he cried.

"It is ready," answered Lancaster, stoutly. "I had but this instant, after hearing from brave Hereford all that you would urge, determined on my plan. We will stand our ground even here in Pontefract, face the king, and give our friends time to rally to our aid."

The words were spoken bravely enough, and how much courage they needed was too apparent from the angry bearing of the rest, of whom not one, as the speaker knew, approved the plan. But these men's blood was up, and they were not minded to brook opposition to their will, and on the instant there followed such a scene of violence, as in its shame put that other, when it was my poor life they sought, out of mind. For as Lancaster spoke, the butcher Clifford's

dagger flashed from its sheath, his murderous hand was laid upon the beard of his chief, and as he held his weapon to royal Lancaster's throat, he cried as one would cry who brooks no answer save one——

“’Odds wounds, sir earl, I will not quit my hold until you promise that we shall fare northward, as we have asked before.”

For an instant no man spoke. I own that for the moment I was minded to strike the caitiff baron to the ground, and so too, I trow, was Hereford. But what would that better either the earl or ourselves, with twenty readyswords itching to avenge their ring-leader's fall? Yet was it a terrible thing and sad, to think that this very man, of royal blood, and power—that but the other day had stretched unquestioned over England, was fallen now so low that his inferior should dare to hand him, and to threaten him in his own house.

It was Lancaster who saved us all. And his manner of doing it won him back some of the respect his weakness had lost.

“Unhand me, Clifford!” he said, with more dignity than seemed possible in such a strait. “You forget what is due to me and to yourself. Small wonder, sirs, that my cousin boasts he has us in the hollow of his hand, when you press your views on your chosen leader in this guise. But, seeing that the strength lies with you, have your way. The plan is yours, not mine, and if in God's good time it shall miscarry, blame yourselves, and this man's violence, not me. Here in these sheltering walls I had held you safe against an army. If we must out into the open again, so be it, and I will fare with you, being

mind to be truer to you than you would be to me. Hereford, give orders at once, and let us away. I know we rush on destruction; but if we must, we must. Northward shall be the order, and God defend the right!"

For a moment a hush fell on them all; for some, I trow, were shocked by Clifford's violence, and some were so torn by their own misgivings as to be swayed by the last spoken word. And as for me, as I heard what the earl said I remembered, now it was too late, all I had learned of the gathering powers in the North, and I prayed in silence that De Harcla, who, as I knew, had taken knighthood of Lancaster's hand and owed him much besides, might be raising a force to aid *us*—not the king. But of them all the man to speak was Hereford, whose stout heart glowed again to think we should be moving, and not standing still to await our fate. It was he who stepped to the front, and urged them all to let bygones be bygones for the common good.

"There, now you have it," he said; "and the plan is your own. Let us forget the past, and show the king that his boast of our divisions is an idle one. If you have forced our leader to do as you would have him, remember he has granted your wish, and show him by your bearing that his fears are as empty as need be."

And so, with strangely mixed feelings, they went from the room, leaving us three together as they found us. And then it was that Lancaster sank with an air of sad dejection into his seat again.

"Nay, my old comrade," cried the braver man, "do not give way like this! It is always the darkest cloud that hides the dawn."

"There is no dawn for me," answered the fallen man, in a deep hollow voice. "Fate has me in her grip, and never means to let me go till I have bitten the dust. As a man sows, so shall he reap; and now, when I can still feel the pollution of that caitiff's fingers on my throat, I know how Thomas Plantagenet is fallen from his high estate, and how the avengers of Gaveston are pressing on his track. Leave me, my friends—perhaps the last of all the crowd that have thronged these very halls in the day of my power—leave me, I say. I would pass this last brief hour in my dishonoured house alone."

And so we left him, though, as it afterwards transpired, he did not pass the time alone altogether as he said. For he sent for Sir John de Bucton, the seneschal, and gave the castle in his charge, bidding him prepare to hold it at any cost while he had food or men. And John swore roundly, perjured knave that he was, yet within a few short days he yielded his charge to the king at the first summons, without one blow struck in its defence.

But we fared northward that very afternoon.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FIGHT AT BOROUGHBIDGE.

I THINK De Bohun's wise plea for unity had sunk into the hearts of the others, for once we fared forth there was no more talk of questioning Lancaster's right to command, and the whole of our little army seemed to breathe one spirit again. I say advisedly our little army, for to me who remembered that other setting forth from Pontefract when full half of England's chivalry marched under the great earl's banner, and every step on our road brought us fresh recruits, the poor four thousand men who followed Lancaster's minished fortunes were but a paltry host at best. And they were all, the sum of his vassals and his friends swept together to meet this last sad change in his fortunes, and more likely to grow less than greater. Maybe there were not a great many who had seen the march of all those years before, but if there were they must have felt, as I did, that fate was dealing harshly at last with our leader, and that he who for long had ruled the realm unquestioned was no longer able to call the country to his aid.

The roads were wet and heavy, and it was not till the evening of the second day that we drew near the

little town of Boroughbridge, the spot where I first saw Piers Gaveston. And here for the second time in my life was I to find it a place of evil tidings, for our scouts brought us back word that the town was held in strength for the king, and that the only bridge for miles across the Ure was strongly fortified against our advance. Here was a pretty plight—one to make the hot-heads who had so gaily turned their backs upon the safe and sheltering walls of Pontefract give pause. For every man of us knew that behind us the king was coming as fast as his host, swollen to great proportions by the daily accessions of strength which desertions from our party gave him, could march; that to our right lay York, always faithful to Edward, and thanks to his fostering care, a far stronger place than he had left it when he fled with Gaveston to the North; and that to our left was the pathless forest of Knaresborough, through which we could scarcely hope to get in safety. We were in a trap, and the only hope was to press on.

De Bohun, ever ready for the fray, would have had us set upon the foe that very night, and trust to our sudden assault to chase him from his post. But Lancaster, though he too saw that forward must be the word, had other plans in view. This Sir Andrew De Harela, who with Simon Warde, the Sheriff of York, blocked our way, was an old adherent of his, and even now, though he had been warned so oft of late how little reliance was to be placed upon the good will of his former friends, our leader thought to win him to his side. In itself his policy was good, for had this Harela thrown in his lot with us the rebels, it was like enough that others would soon follow suit, and so we

might have pleased ourselves whether we wended our way forward into the north country, where the king scarce dare follow such a host, or turned and faced the royal army with good prospects of success. The plan, I say, was a good enough one, and had it prevailed would have spelled success, but its failure put the last touch to our ruin.

For all through the next day we let the precious hours go fleeting by, while the foe strengthened a position already too strong, and the king was ever drawing nearer from the south. And we did it in vain, for neither threats nor bribes could shake the purpose of the Governor of Carlisle, and his men, drawn from a class to whom the name of Lancaster was a word and nothing more, refused to listen to our pleas for brotherly aid. We lay so close to each other that there was frequent speech between us, they on the north bank, we on the south of the river Ure. And no one, I trow, would have guessed from what was in the doing that ere many hours were past we were to be in the throes of a deadly battle for our freedom, nay, for our very lives, with these our countrymen.

At last, after a morning spent in fruitless negotiation, our leader sent a flag of truce to the Warden, asking speech of him, and De Harcla agreed. This place was appointed to be the bridge—on which hung our fate—and the party was to be six from either side. With De Harcla came Sir Simon Warde and others whom I knew not, and from our part were De Bohun, Clifford, myself, and other twain, and on the bridge we met, unarmed, about its centre, while a party of men-at-arms was drawn up a short way off from either end.

I trow that in this last desperate throw for victory Lancaster bore himself bravely enough. Advancing with De Bohun, a little ahead of our party, he hailed De Harcla, who with Sir Simon Warde stood forth from the others, with all the gracious kindness he knew so well how to affect.

"Well met, Sir Andrew!" he cried, and held out his hand.

But Harcla, a stern forbidding man, waved it back.

"I cannot take the hand of a rebel in arms against his Grace the King," he said.

A deep flush mounted to the earl's face at the man's churlishness, but he restrained with an effort the answer which rose to his haughty lips, and affected to make light of the affront.

"Time was, Sir Andrew," he said, "when you would have not deemed it amiss to grasp my hand. What have I done to forfeit your esteem?"

"Time was, as you say, sir earl," replied the other; "but that cannot be now. I am the servant of the king, and you in arms against him. We may not meet as friends, I trow."

"Harcla," said Lancaster gravely, "I would have you think a little ere you reject the friendship I offer. Would you have us here, and these honest Englishmen who follow you and me, fly at each others' throats in fratricidal conflict? Would you have my sword, which laid knighthood on your own shoulder, crossed with yours in anger? Come, we have no quarrel with each other, and as for my good cousin the king—why, I would but free him from the evil councillors who lead him astray to the nation's undoing, and occupy

the place in his regard to which the nearness of our blood entitles me."

"Kings may not be sued with sword in hand, lord earl."

"Wherefore I ask you to join with me in representing the wrongs under which the nation labours. If you and I, Sir Andrew, stand shoulder to shoulder in this business, what can the rest of England say? Our will to-day must be theirs to-morrow, and this threatening of brothers' blood poured out in anger pass away."

"I will be no rebel, my lord."

"Nor I, for that," cried Lancaster. "But it is open to the greatest as to the least to seek redress. Join me, and your name shall stand higher than it ever will if you throw in your lot with that fickle king, for you will have the nation's thanks, against the selfish gratitude of one man."

"My lord, I need no nation's thanks. It is to the king I look for my reward."

"I hope, Sir Andrew, you are no jackal to look for the pickings when the lion is dead? But if I thought you were, why, Thomas Plantagenet can reward as well as ever could the king. If it is lands and rank you look to, take your choice of my five earldoms, and it shall be yours this day. I may be a rebel," he added proudly, "but I can reward my friends as plentifully as any man."

I thought, for I was watching Sir Andrew nearly, that for an instant the greatness of the promised guerdon had shaken his loyalty to the king. He certainly was moved, and seemed unable for the instant to answer. Seeing this, the earl struck another blow.

"Yes, take your choice, Sir Andrew," he said cheerily; "and it is freely yours. And this I say, and of its truth no man dare make question, that never yet has any man known how to rue my word—could my royal cousin say as much, Sir Knight?"

But, after all, his pleading fell on ears deaf to his purport. With a mighty effort the Warden seemed to shake them aside—how great an effort none of us knew then, for what the earl had said was true, and the reward from him was certain, that from the king as yet a chance. He shook off the temptation, as I say, and answered not as we hoped.

"It is useless for you to urge this, lord earl," he said gruffly, as though to assure us how stern he was in his purpose, "and dishonour for me to hear it. I am for the king. But of the love I bear yourself, and as a token of the memory of your own unforgotten kindness to me, I will promise this. Render yourself a prisoner to me this day, and bid your fellows disperse, and I will myself hie me to the king, and ask as my reward the forgiveness of the past. What say you to that, my lord?"

"I say that when I am taken it will be either dead or so far stricken that my hand no longer can defend me. You are mad to think of such a thing, and were I foolish enough to fall in with your humour, why, I might as reasonably go hang myself at once. You cannot know my cousin, Sir Andrew, or you would not make me such an offer. The word forgiveness is to him unknown."

"I have no other answer, sir earl."

"Then be it so, and look to yourself, Sir Andrew. When we join issue, the ending of it is in the hand of

God; but this I know, that if the victory shall rest with you, and you shall have your way, none the less the day will come when you shall rue refusing the hand of friendship to me, who never yet went back upon my word, preferring to lay your faith upon your faithless king. Who makes can unmake, Sir Knight."

It was with hearts full of misgivings that we turned back, for though we had failed in our purpose, we had gained some notion of the strength of the position we must attack, and even De Bohun, whose courage rode high as ever, owned that it were hard to carry the bridge, and if we failed there was no other way.

And sad and silent was our camp that night, for already the shadow of the coming evil was upon us, and worst of all on Lancaster, who seemed disheartened by his failure to shake the Warden more than by all the crosses that had gone before. As for me, I laid me down in my lodging and tried with but poor success to sleep, for I was sad and anxious, too, and though this was not my first fight, and the odds scarce worse than they had been at Myton, yet the thing was different. Heaven only knew with whom I might cross swords on the morrow—it was, as Lancaster had said, a fratricidal war.

But I was up and stirring with the first light of dawn, which comes in good time on the fifteenth of March. And then I hied me to a little chapel which lay on our side of the river, and confessed me and was shrived. And then, feeling I had made my peace with Heaven, I turned again towards the river, from which the grey mist was still rising thick before the coming sun, and took my place beside De Bohun, who, on foot and in full armour, was marshalling our host.

The plan agreed on was this. First the archers, of whom we had a fine company, drawn from the earl's tenantry in Yorkshire, were to rain their shafts upon the foe, and then we, the knights and squires and men-at-arms, were to fall upon the bridge and take it if we could. And should this last business hang, then Lancaster, with our small reserve, was to march upon a ford which we had discovered on one flank, and, forcing the passage, fall upon the enemy in rear. And I know not why it was, but all who could attached themselves that day to Hereford, and with Lancaster there rode but a few. The stigma of his flight from Burton-on-the-Trent was on him yet, and men mistrusted his courage in the coming fight. And well they might, as the event will show.

It was just eight o'clock when De Bohun gave the word, and the archers advancing commenced their deadly work. These were the flower of English bowmen, drawn from Wakefield and the neighbouring district, and both skilful and well tried in fight. And what they could do they did, raining their shafts so thick upon the foe upon the bridge, that ere long the fiery Constable of England, who was ever ready for the fight, deemed the time had come, and led his mailed ranks upon the bridge.

It was a gallant sight, and a gallant rush as well. We were no laggards in such matters, and no braver or more skilful fighter than our leader lived. We swarmed upon the little wooden bridge—had it but been of stone, that day had told another tale, I trow—and the stout foemen quailed before such a rush of desperate men. For both sides knew full well what it meant to us. That bridge once clear, so was our way to the

North, where none dared follow Lancaster, or brave him in his own den, and if we failed, why, behind us came the king. Shoulder to shoulder we went, Clifford and Mowbray, Touchet and Warren de Lisle—the same that rode post to York for the Ordainers to learn the truth of Gaveston's coming—and I, while ever a step in front of us, crying his battle cry, and sweeping all before him with his mighty sword, was the bravest man I have ever known, the peerless De Bohun. Nor were our labours in vain, for inch by inch we drove the gallant foemen back, and in a trice the bridge was more than half won. Had only Lancaster been true to his word—nay, true to his own great name—King Edward had never had the chance to boast of that, the solitary victory of his inglorious life. But Lancaster was no longer the man of fifteen years before. He rode to the ford in a half-hearted fashion, and at the moment when the diversion might have won the day, and when a turn of the scale had given us the all-important bridge, he turned (so we learned after) before a splattering of arrows, which need no more have frightened mailed warriors than hail can scare schoolchildren—I say, he turned and *fled*.

Of this we knew nothing at the time, but our misfortune overtook us at the instant through a very different cause. We were three-parts across, and though some had bitten the dust and the fight was hot, the day seemed to be ours, when on the sudden the brave De Bohun, who was hewing his way to safety through that carnage, threw up his hands, and, with an awful cry, fell at my very feet, stone dead. It was the bridge—the thrice-accursed wooden bridge—that killed him; for, as it afterwards transpired, a half-naked

Welsh spearman, standing in safety underneath us, thrust his long lance at random through the space between two joists, and, the head entering our leader's body from beneath, below his armour, stretched him lifeless on the spot. Nor was this the worst. This sudden stroke of fortune, utterly unaccountable to us at the time, for a moment paralyzed our arms, and then, when we recovered our wits, the enemy had seen their chance, and, already elated by the way that Lancaster had feared them, poured down upon us, and swept us from the bridge.

Of what followed I never like to think. It is ever hard to say what chances when the blood is up, and the eyes blinded by the lust of murder. I know that we, the knights and barons who were left, formed ourselves shoulder to shoulder and back to back upon the southern bank, and fought while brave men could, till at last Sir Simon Warde in pity came forward to beg us to lay down our arms. And it was to him that I, battered and bruised by many a hard knock, but otherwise unhurt, rendered my sword. The York men closed around us, and it was well that they did—for Harela's soldiery, some of them savages from the Western border, far different to my own honest Northumbrians, and others wild Welshmen, had gone mad with the lust of plunder. And, worse far than this, the bitterness of this fratricidal war had for the moment destroyed the kindliness of our own Englishmen, and, in this their victory, men of one house and blood forgot the ties which bound them, and pursued their own kindred with the relentless hatred of alien foes.

It was well, I repeat, that we were safe in the kindly hands of the men of York, who, though they

made no secret of their expectation that we should all be hanged, or of their opinion that it was no more than we deserved, still did their best to safeguard us that day. But if they saved our lives (which was something), they failed to protect my property; for, while in obedience to their orders I was stripping off my mail, I exposed the bag containing Gaveston's chain and my dear love's kerchief, and a fellow, whom I had never seen in the place before, stepped up to me and, ere I could prevent him, cut the string with his dagger, and carried off the prize from under my very eyes.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW EARL THOMAS DIED.

THEY tell me that in some chronicle of that most disastrous day at Boroughbridge it has been written that, "To the church-hold no reverence was given, and father pursued son, and son pursued father." For my own part I can well believe it, and none the less from what befell Lancaster that day.

For where, it may be asked, was our leader while we were fighting to the last for our freedom and our lives? It might have been thought that, having once made up his mind to flee away and leave us, he would have done his best, and that not without some hope of success. For, had he gone westward, Harela could hardly have followed him, and every step he took brought him nearer to some stronghold of his own, where he might have lain hid and waited for better times. But no; his spirit was too broken even for that, and he never got further than the little chapel, in the which I had that very morning confessed my sins, where, so they tell me, he cast himself in despair before the altar for sanctuary, with a bitter cry to his God for that protection which was no longer to be accorded to him by any on earth—

“ Good Lord, I render myself to Thee, and put me in Thy mercy ! ”

It was his last hope truly, and but a poor one, seeing the men he had to deal with. For, as I have said, “ To the church-hold no reverence was given,” and when presently De Harcla’s men found him, and he in deadly terror refused to come forth and surrender of his own accord, impious hands dragged him from the shelter of the sanctuary and took him outside. I think—nay, I hope—that in that instant the bitterness of death was past. I know that from that time he became himself again, and in the courage of despair ceased to take heed of his own worthless life. Of his thoughts then I know nothing—none ever will—though it is safe to suppose that the last appeal of the murdered Gaveston was ever before his eyes ; but with his bearing no man had fault to find. Perhaps, knowing the worst was come upon him, he had hoped that these captors of his might be tempted to take his life. But Harcla took care that that should not be, knowing that to the king the chance to do his cousin to death with ignominy would be sweeter than the victory itself. So there and then they stripped him of his arms and mail, and bringing him the soiled livery of one of his own grooms whom they had just killed, they gave him that for covering, and then, having manacled his hands and feet, they led him away—led away the greatest prince of the royal house next to the King Edward himself—in this shocking guise, draggled and manacled like any common cut-purse caught thieving in a crowd.

Nor did we others fare much better, except in so far as Sir Simon Warde and his men could serve us,

which was not far. For Harela meant that his great services should be duly blazoned forth so as to secure a proportionate reward. And some he sent by road, and others, myself among the number, he carried with himself by river—a sad procession of doomed men, of whom I was by no means the least dispirited, for that accursed Welshman's theft had robbed me of more than a little gold, having taken the very talisman which guarded my life itself. For I had not forgotten the promise of the king, and looked to Gaveston's gift to bear me harmless after all. But it was gone beyond recall, and with it full three parts of my own chance of life. Fain would I have complained of the indignity, but what would it have availed me then? My captors would have bidden me with jeers thank Heaven I had saved my worthless skin, and pointed to what had befallen greater men than I was in the hour of defeat. So I was fain to sit silent and hug my sorrow as I might, glad that at such a time the disgrace that attends the path of the vanquished is small or great in proportion to the man. What Lancaster felt in this hour of bitterness I dare not even think, seeing how I, but one of the least whom Harela was dragging to the gallows tree, was glad to shrink into my corner and thank that kindly Providence which had sent others of more importance to take that howling mob's attention from such as me.

For first we came to York, whence, as I have said, a great part of the victorious army had marched to meet us, and where the news had been hailed with the joy natural to a proud town which had in those past long years suffered many a slight because of its loyalty to the king. I, who knew the ancient city well, and

who could count many friends and acquaintances there, could scarce believe my eyes as I walked in the sullen ranks of the defeated faction through the streets, and saw the savage and unchristian joy with which those kindly Yorkshiremen greeted the downfall of us others, who, whatever else we were, were their own countrymen none the less. And here, too, the cup of Lancaster's bitterness was filled, for here for the first time, they told us of that perjured caitiff, John de Bucton's treason, and how to save his own worthless neck the foresworn villain had thrown open the gates of Pontefract to the king without one blow struck in its defence, or one thought of his own honour which bade him keep his plighted word, and make the capture of the strongest fortress in the North a thing for men to talk of in after years. They told us that when our late leader heard of this, the unkindest cut of all, he gave a great sob, as though his heart were broken, and asked if there were no one who had known him in the days of his power to put him from his misery for the sake of some favour given in the past. But, no! Harcla had him too close for that.

And now the word came from the king in his new palace of Pontefract that we were to be brought to him to stand our trial. Not all—for some of the lesser knights and barons were to be left in York to suffer there, as rebels taken in arms, when he should make his pleasure known. But nearly fifty of us went with Lancaster to Pontefract, some to die with him, and all to share the foul indignities heaped on the fallen rebel by his cousin the king.

I can never forget the day we rode into Pontefract, fettered and manacled like felons—we who had ridden

from the town in all the pride of our martial state but ten short days before. Twice had I ridden through the streets of the little Yorkshire town in Lancaster's train, and once at least had I seen them thick with his friends and vassals, cheering their favourite on to fight in the people's cause. And now, what a change was here! The few who might have shown him favour, even in the hour of his defeat, were in hiding, and the streets and lanes leading to the castle were packed with alien soldiery—alien, I mean, to the town—men who had gathered with their feudal lords from every part of England and of Wales to aid the king in this, his one triumphant war. For what could we any of us, what could Lancaster fore all, hope from such as these, hirelings who but did their masters' bidding when they yelled and hooted the fallen earl? I have in my life faced many a rabble, but never such a crew as this; and even to this day the foul cries and the curses which they heaped upon their captive enemy ring in my ears. And for three long miles they dragged their prisoners through such a crowd as this, and at the head of us rode Lancaster, but three short months before the real ruler of the land, sat on a sorry steed, and still clad in the faded livery of his own slaughtered servant. For my own part I felt little—I could afford to be content as I thought of him, and of what his sufferings must be.

For that night they thrust us into any dungeons that could hold us safe, but Lancaster they singled out again. It so chanced that but a short while before he had caused to be built in the thickness of the wall a great square tower, facing to the north, to which he gave the name of Adam De Swillington,

sometime the seneschal of the place. Below this tower was a great square pit, dug out of the hill, with no opening or door save only a trap in the flooring of the chamber above, full ten feet from the bottom. Into this hole they thrust the earl, and left him to pass in solitary darkness the last night he was fated to spend on earth, while his victorious rival held revel with his favourites in the castle hall hard by.

It were not hard to guess what sort of a night he spent—or what were the moods of any of us, for that matter. We were not even told when we should stand our trial—not even if the mockery of hearing a prejudged cause was to be gone through at all. But on the morrow, about ten of the clock, our gaolers herded us all into the great hall of the castle, and there penned us up on one side to see justice done on our leader—the sort of justice that King Edward had been nursing since the murder of Piers Gaveston by this very man.

The dais, on which the culprit had so often sat to rule the revels of his happier days, was set in order for the convenience of his peers who were to judge him, and in the centre, under a canopy emblazoned with the royal arms, was a chair for the king. And presently the nobles who had leagued to defeat him entered in groups to take their place. Many were there, but the chief were the Earls of Kent; De Warrenne, his lifelong foe; Arundel and Pembroke, sometime his friends; and the king's two favourites, the Spencers, all unheeding the fate that dogs those who misuse the hour of victory to gratify their private ends. And, last of all, there came the king himself leaning on Andrew de Harcla's arm, whom he had

but that instant created Earl of Carlisle for his surpassing service. And as King Edward took his place to preside over these proceedings in which he took no active part, there was on his face that evil smile of which I have spoken before, which boded ill to him on whom it chanced to rest. And so at last the word was given that they should bring forth the earl. I had not seen him since the battle, save at such distance as prevented my gauging his bearing in this hour of trouble. But as he walked with firm—nay, even haughty—step to the place before the dais, where they bade him stand, my heart leaped for very joy, for I could read his soul shining in his constant eye, and knew that if of late he had lived a coward, now at the ending of it he would die as a brave man. Standing there, a beaten, broken prisoner in his own castle hall, with not a soul that dared to say, “God bless him!” and on the dais, where he was wont to sit in hall or council, that grim row of pitiless faces of the men who thirsted for his blood, his look was high as befitted his great race and name, and his manner that of one who has made his peace with earthly matters, and only looks to meet his God.

And so the trial began—if that can be so called which was but one long flow of foul abuse on one side, and of protests howled down when offered. For a long time he stood silent, while the Spencers, father and son, were earning their promised reward; but, at the last, when some word more cruel than the wont of them dropped from his accuser’s lips, he cried in his anguish—

“Shall I die without answer?”

But that was all. They drowned his words in foul

abuse once more ; and presently, the king being sated, they called for silence, while the elder Spencer read the traitor's doom. And a terrible one it was, and made us, who knew that our own turn came next, blanch to hear it. For it was ordered that he should be "hanged for his robberies, drawn for his treason, and beheaded for his flight."

As the Earl of Winchester ceased reading, there was a moment's pause, and then he was led away to suffer then and there, and I saw him no more. But before long I heard the ending of it, which I must briefly tell ere I pass on with my tale.

Outside the hall a messenger overtook him to tell him of what in mockery they called the mercy of the king. By reason of his royal blood the more disgraceful parts of the sentence were remitted, and he was to die by having his head struck from his body. So they set him on a poor old lean grey beast, with a halter of a wisp of straw, clad still in his mean attire, with a sorry hat on his head, a Gascon knave to lead him, and one poor preaching friar to be his sole remaining comforter on earth. Between two lines of Edward's jeering hirelings they led him out, through those great gates which he had been wont to boast in happier days no man could force, through the street of his own feudal town, out on to a rising ground to eastward of the castle, known ever since as Saint Thomas's Hill, and here they bade him make ready to die.

But not in peace—for when he dropped on his knees to say a prayer, with his face towards the east, one Hugo de Muston—whose caitiff name lives for the foul jibe alone—bade him turn rather to the north-

ward, where dwelt his friends the Scots. And he obeyed right meekly, and presently a villain of London took off his head.

Thus sadly perished the greatest noble of his age. He was a man whose life, as I look back upon it from the calmer distance of these later years, rises before my eyes as some gaudy patchwork here bright and there darkly confused. For much he did with honour, and some things he lived to rue, and often he was great, and as readily fell into disgrace. Had he not lived those few days of senseless panic after Burton-on-the-Trent, he would have been deemed a brave man enough—as brave as the courage of his death deserved. Had he been stronger, he might have years before displaced the king, who, as we know, soon fell in his turn. For herein lies the marvel of it all, that in thus slaying his greatest enemy, King Edward slew his greatest friend. While Lancaster lived on, content to play with treason, but never striking home at the feudal privileges of his house—nay, even ready to aid these last, when threatened, to his own despite—King Edward's crown sat easy on his head. But when this royal rebel died, there arose others of a sterner make, who speedily visited on the weak and cruel tyrant the punishment of his sins. I say that in all those days of contradiction there was no stranger contradiction than this, that Edward's hour of triumph was so used by him as to prove the worst day's work of all his chequered life. Stay though, one other contradiction must I set down. God knows this earl was no saint, only a weak and erring man, more often wrong than right, yet in these later days nothing will satisfy our leaders but that he shall be deemed

a martyr fallen in a holy cause, and now they tell me he is duly canonized by our father the Pope, and stands beside that other Saint Thomas who fell in an earlier struggle with another king. Perhaps a fitting ending to so patched a life.

But I must hie me back to us others, whom I left waiting in the hall after they had hurried our leader away to his doom. In all they reckon that no less than ninety-five of knightly rank laid down their arms at Boroughbridge to Harcla, and of us few escaped to tell of it. Clifford and Mowbray, Touchet and Mandute, Chency and Bradburne, the younger Fitz-William, and stout Warren de Lisle, either died in the battle or suffered after it; some few at Pontefract, the rest in other places, to strike the necessary terror through the rebel counties. Nor was there much delay, for though they drove us back to our dungeon again as soon as Lancaster had passed to his doom, the work began at once, and hour by hour some fresh victim was drawn out, and left us never to return.

It was a terrible afternoon for all of us, each man sitting thinking that his turn might come the next. And merrily the cruel work went forward, so that of our party of some twenty there were but half a dozen left when at last the night set in, and darkness stopped the butchery for that day. And then the word came to confine us in separate cells, and with scarce time for a handshake with those whom we never looked to see again, unless we met beyond the grave, they led us away.

For my own part the shame and sorrow of that day had worn me out, and when my gaolers brought

me to a cell in the wall overlooking the priory church of All Saints—the same to which I had accompanied De Valence the day we marched to York on Gaveston's business—I refused the food they brought me, and threw myself in despair down on the pallet, and after an hour or so spent in gloomy communings with my own soul, fell off to sleep in dire fatigue. Tired nature could hold out no longer, and, being young, I could not even now bring myself to think that the dawn would see my death. So it came about that when I had better have prayed I slept.

CHAPTER XIX.

I ESCAPE TO DUNSTANBOROUGH AGAIN.

I MUST have slept for some hours, for when I awoke the noises in the great castle, which was swarming with men, had ceased. The turret in which I was a prisoner gave on to the great courtyard, and through the narrow lancet-window, which in the daytime gave me light, the cries and sounds of life were borne up clear enough. It had been dark before, but it was far darker now—at least I thought so, as I turned uneasily on my couch, and lay listening for any sound that might break the monotony of the silent night. And as my senses began to grow keener, there smote upon my ears a sound which I had scarce looked to hear—that of the regular breathing of some creature within the room.

I sprang to my feet in vague terror—such a panic as seizes the boldest in the stillness of the night. But ere I could close with my secret assailant, for such I was persuaded he was, a voice checked me.

“Aubrey de Mauleverer”—the tones, though spoken low, were somewhat familiar to my ear—“are you awake? Speak with bated breath, for your life, and maybe mine, hangs on it.”

"I am awake," I answered; "but who are you?"

"One who would aid you. Sit on your pallet again, and answer me, but briefly, for the moon will rise within the hour, and ere it does our work must needs be ended. Do you know now who I am?"

"It is Father Anselm," I answered.

"Even so. Now, what say you to the turn that events have taken since you disregarded my advice?"

"I fegs," I answered, "what can I say? except that you were right; and had I done as you bade me, I were safe in Dunstanborough now, instead of——"

"Instead of what?" he asked sternly, as I paused.

"Instead of near my ending," I replied, humbly enough.

"How near you little think, sir braggart," he said grimly; "yet thrice this very day was your name called, and thrice was the order changed. Nay, I would say further, that once the great revenge was done with, it was over your poor carcase that the vultures quarrelled. There were those that sought your death, Sir Knight, and but that others were well minded to you, you were carrion ere this."

"Whom have I offended so deeply?" I asked.

"Now out upon you for wasting our time," he answered quickly, and I guessed that what he meant was that he was not minded to say more. "I have only told you this to show you how urgent the matter is. If the morrow's sun finds you here I will not answer for your life."

"And where else shall I be?" I asked. "I know something of this place, and it is hard to get in or out of it, if those who guard it be so minded."

"To you perhaps," he replied, "but not so to me.

Now, here is my offer. You shall have your freedom——”

“A moment,” I answered; “but how can that be? I know you are versed in many whiles, but unless you can shake down walls with blessing or curses—for it matters little which they be—I do not see how my freedom is to be compassed this night.”

Monk as he was, he stamped his foot for very rage.

“By'r Ladye,” he groaned, “the boy is a fool!”

“Not quite so ill as that, father,” I replied. “Come, if you doubt me, here is what will make you change your mind. I accept your conditions before you name them.”

“And what makes you do that?” he asked in surprise.

“Father,” I answered gravely, “I am not so foolish as you think me. The one part of your tale I would not question readily is that which tells me that this day my head has gone three times in danger of the hangman's noose. You advised me well before, why should I doubt you now, the more seeing that you are the only friend that has risked aught to aid me? I say again, do you lead, and I will follow.”

A strong hand grasped my arm, and a quick, eager voice, far different from the cold, calculating tones I had been hearing thus far, smote upon my ear.

“Enough. I see you are a true Mauleverer, fool-hardy, yet cunning; doubting, yet staunch. Have no fear but I shall save you. Come!”

He led me unresisting to the doorway, which he pushed open softly, and then the mystery began to be explained. In the outer chamber a light burnt feebly

in the cresset, and there, on a pallet beside the door, was stretched the man who should have watched me, fast in sleep. The monk bent over him, and then, turning to me, whispered, "Have no fear; he is well drugged. Let us away." And, saying this, he opened an outer door, not that by which I had entered the room, but another which gave upon a narrow staircase leading upwards to the roof. I gave a gasp, for now I knew his plan. The upper portion of these towers was used as a shelter or guardhouse for those whose business it was to man the walls, and between them lay a curtain-wall for archers. Once on this, a rope would do the rest, for, thanks to the steepness of the hillside, there was no moat on this part of the wall.

Silently he led me upwards, I wondering all the while whether the sentinel here too was drugged and helpless as the other had been. Nor was it long ere we two stood upon the parapet alone; and though I heard the steady tramp of the warders on either hand, none came to mar our work, which in truth was very swiftly done. From under his cloak the monk drew a long rope, and made it fast to a block of masonry which crowned the wall.

"Fifty feet below you," he said, "your guide stands ready. Remember your promise, and do as he shall bid you, when all will be well. I am too old to go, even were it wise, seeing they will miss me and guess the rest. But do you as I bid you, and trust to our meeting shortly again, when you shall learn more. Remember, too, that this eclipse need be but temporary if only you bear yourself wisely. You go to hiding now, but when you come again it will be, I hope, to prosper, as you might have done ere this had

you but been guided by counsels wiser than your own. Now hasten, for the moon will shortly rise, and then this friendly cloak of darkness will aid us no more. Go, and my blessings with you."

I did not hesitate, for I knew that he was right; but, grasping the rope, I slipped over the parapet as best I could. I had done as much often enough in my boyish days on the cliffs birds'-nesting, and might well now try it for my life. Yet it was not easy, for the wall seemed verily to cling to me for a space, bruising my hands and body, and hindering my speed. But this trouble soon ceased; to be succeeded by another, for some ten feet or so below the parapet I found myself free of the wall and swinging in space. For a moment I could scarce think what to make of it, and then it flashed across my mind that the place from which I had descended was as it were a gallery built out from the main wall, and that, doubtless, the monk had chosen it for this reason. Yet was my situation perilous, for the wind was high, and I swung to and fro in the darkness, slipping cautiously downwards hand by hand, yet feeling sick and giddy, and wondering if my strained wrists could keep their hold until the bottom was reached. And then there came another change, for the rope ceased to sway, and I felt that some one was steadying it from below, and so slipped down the quicker for the knowledge that help was so near at hand. Of the distance I knew nothing of course, and it was with a feeling of deep relief that I felt my body grasped by strong arms, and so was brought to mother earth at last. Then did the waiting friend whistle softly, and in a minute or so the rope, with the loop severed, fell at

my feet, to be caught up and wound round the stranger's girdle, while a voice whispered in my ear, "Don this disguise, Sir Aubrey, and let us away."

Yet did I not obey for the instant, for before I could do aught else I must needs grasp honest Hugh Miller's hand, exclaiming, as I did so—

"Hugh! And is it truly yourself? I had deemed you had left me for ever."

"In your prosperity, perhaps, Sir Aubrey—never in your need. But let us away ere the moon rise to betray us to the watchers on the walls. It was only one sentinel, I trow, that was bribed, and the others, if they see us here, will raise the hue and cry."

I did as he bade me, putting on the long frock and cowl of a monk, and so fully concealing myself from view. Then rapidly, and in strict silence, we slipped down the bank to the lane at its foot, and here Hugh fearlessly lighted a horn lantern he carried and led the way.

"If any meet us now, Sir Knight, you are a friar, I trow, called to the bedside of some dying penitent, and I the serving-man sent to bring and guide you. Muffle your head in that cowl and hurry along thus with downcast eyes, and trust to me to answer any who might stop us. The place is full of drunken soldiery this night."

That was no time for talking, so I did as he bade me, too chastened now by the near approach of death to dispute his orders—I, who but a short month earlier had been so full of confidence in myself. And down the lane we hurried, past the great church in which the lights shone out from the east window—for the monks, so he told me, were saying masses for the souls

of those called to their last account that day. Here and there we passed belated revellers hurrying home after their triumphant night's debauch, but these stood aside and uncovered as Hugh cried boldly, "Way, there; way for the holy friar, I tell you!"

And so we passed on to the hill beyond, and ere we crossed it Hugh must needs pluck me by the sleeve, and, sinking on his knees, whisper in my ear—

"Pray for the soul of Thomas Plantagenet, Sir Knight, who on this spot this day was called to his last account."

And with a shudder I obeyed him, thinking the while how narrowly I had escaped a like fate myself.

But as yet we dared not delay, and a minute later were hurrying onward into the shadow of some houses which lay beyond. And here beside a hedge were tethered two stout horses, with a fellow in charge of them, who, as he saw my companion, unloosed their halters and signed to us to mount. Before the moon rose some few minutes later, we were galloping away a mile or more from the outskirts of the town.

"There, now!" cried Hugh in triumph. "We are safe, I trow. But on, Sir Knight; we must onward as fast as we may to the river, where we take ship again."

And as we rode he told me all I longed to know. It seems that he had left me at Dunstanborough by Father Anselm's express command. The good monk was so certain of the coming downfall of the faction with which I had so rashly thrown in my lot, that from the instant that I left the North he was busy contriving my escape. And it was well he did so, for the end had come more suddenly than any of them

had expected, and it was only thanks to Hugh himself, who for my sake had marched with Harela, that they were able to do all they had. The monk, it seems, bore a high name in the North, so much so that he could bribe all within the castle to aid me, even the fellow who slept in the outer chamber of my prison, who had willingly let himself be drugged at the other's desire. Hugh was to be in waiting, and to guide me to the sea, where there was ready the ship in which I had sailed from Dunstanborough, with honest John Craster in her charge, only too glad to help his fellow-countryman to escape from a shameful death. Then was I to fare northward without loss of time, and lie hid near the Border to wait on events.

Hugh bade me make no effort to spare my horse, seeing we had not far to go, and after riding less than two hours, the fresher breeze told me we were coming to water. And there at Snaith there was a boat waiting for us in the river, and, entering, we dropped down some three miles or so; and then, ere the sun rose over the land to the eastward, I stood once again on the deck of the vessel, and grasped honest John Craster's hand.

"Now, praised be He who watches over all us His creatures, Sir Aubrey!" cried the honest seaman, as he brushed something other than sea brine from his eyes. "This week or more have we sat here, expecting any moment to hear of your death, and now—why, in a few hours' space we shall be on the open seas, and no man shall take you alive. But I wot you will be tired after your gallop. Lie down and draw my cloak around you, while I put matters in train, for yonder comes the dawn."

And so I did, and rested too, though I could not (for the great excitement that had me) sleep. I watched the seamen, every one of whom I knew, and who, one and all, were rejoicing at my escape, handling the little craft. And stout John Craster grasped the tiller, and roared his orders to the crew in that strong voice of his which was so full of comfort to one hard driven as I had been, and we dropped down the river, keeping well in mid stream, and every moment brought us nearer to the open sea, where I knew that we were safe.

I wondered if any knew that I was gone from Pontefract, and what efforts would be made to capture me again. But only once was there a sign of any movement ashore, and that was when they ran up a great flag from the beach at Hull, and a boat put off as if to follow us.

"What does that mean, John Craster!" I asked.

"They think to stop us, as if I were going to wait while they search me for arms or Heaven knows what. No, no, my friends, not with a breeze like that behind me." And he pointed to where across the water there came a ripple showing the change of wind.

Even as he spoke the wind filled our sails, and they began to draw. Those in the boat made signs and shouted, but we took no notice, and every minute that passed widened the gap between us. Yet a sudden thought struck me. "Stay, John Craster!" I cried. "Mayhap this is some other in misfortune. Ought we not to stop and see?"

"Not if it were the earl himself, Sir Knight," he answered, and he put his tiller across and ran before the stiffening breeze towards the open sea. And only

when the land stood distant, and the fear of pursuit was at an end, would he ask us our news.

Never shall I forget the rage and anguish of those lion-hearted fellows when Hugh told them of the ending of their lord. Methinks had the king been there among us at that moment they would have torn him limb from limb, as some wept while others cursed, and with deep oaths swore vengeance for the shameful deed. And I, who had stood near enough to a like fate to feel it far more keenly than ever they did, could have wept in my turn to think how, had we but broken through that iron ring at Boroughbridge, King Edward's self with all England behind him had not sufficed to tear Earl Thomas from among the children whom he loved, and who loved him in return.

And I could see these great rough sea-wolves—men inured to storm and risk of death at every turn—stealing their wistful glances at me as men who would say—

“As our dear lord died, so might he. Well, he has cast his lot among us, and it shall go hard with us if he regret it. We will guard him with our lives from any risk of harm.”

And so we fared to Craster and to Dunstanborough again, bearing the first tidings to the people of their loved earl's death, and to the elder Touchet of the danger of his son, a danger which, alas! was not warded off as mine had been. And presently a sure hand brought us news from the south, that men were coming to hold the castle for the king, and kind Sir William told me that for his part he should not stay them, seeing his master was dead, and had left no son to claim his honours, and that it were best that I

should fare forth whither I listed, and I was fain obey.

But not alone this time—thank God for that! Stout Hugh went with me, and that rough old sea-dog, John Craster, told me he was minded to come too, but that he could not stomach inland breezes or live far from his beloved sea. There was a promise of an amnesty, he told me, to all except a few, of whom I was one, and so he would stay, and keep his boat in trim against my coming, should I need his aid again.

CHAPTER XX.

NEWS OF THE SCOTS.

BUT Hugh and I lay hid safe enough up on the wild hills above old Alnwick, and if any suspected my being there, none came to seek. I never doubted but that I was as free from risk in the shepherd's hut as I might have been miles out to sea, or within the strong walls of Pontefract, well garrisoned and provisioned for a siege. For I had for my rampart the honest hearts of the true Northumbrians around me, whose love would bear me harmless before king or earl, and whose hands would drop the ploughshare to grasp the sword if my life or liberty were in doubt. And so we twain lay hidden, if I should call that hidden which was as open as the light of day, and tramped the heather from dawn to sunset together, or lay for hours in sight of the mighty Cheviots, just as we used to lie beside the Rumbel Kern when we were boys together at Embleton, and spoke of the mighty dead, and of the miseries that had befallen our native land. And I was not unhappy, though oft times the thought of Alison would bring a cloud to my brow, for some one—who it was I never learned—had given me a letter from the court, in which she was spoken of as one

who mourned for her lover, and if that lover was not me I know not who it was. At times, too, I would marvel that good Father Anselm never came to see me, nor sent to me to come to him, but Hugh would bring me news of him, gathered he would not say where, in which they spoke of him as watching for the proper moment for me to appear in the great world again.

News had we too of the king. We learned how, after this solitary victory—the only one he ever won, he or his arms—he had gone mad with pride, and when he and his minions had sated their lust of blood upon their enemies at home, they must needs forth to war once again with the Scots. And seeing that all men know that when England puts forth her might against a poor country like Scotland, this last stands no chance, I was not surprised to learn that the Bruce, despairing of such another day as Bannockburn, had tried to break the blow by craft instead of by force of arms. As Edward with a mighty army pressed across the border, marching quite close past the spot where I myself lay hid, the Scots retired before him, carrying away all they could, so that there was neither corn nor cattle to feed the mighty host. Indeed, such was the craft of the Scots, and, as I think, the wrath of Heaven against this dastardly king, who, when he could find no warriors to fight against, must needs burn two of the border abbeys, Melrose and Dryburgh, in sheer despite, that between the clearing of the land through which our English marched, and a great wind which held the fleet bearing provisions by sea, our countrymen went near starvation, and the excesses of the soldiery, when once again they met with ample

food, cost the king nigh as many stout fellows as Bannockburn itself.

Anyway he was forced to turn, with naught to show for his pains save (as grim De Warrenne put it) "one lame bull too sick to march away with the rest," and passing by my hiding-place, went slowly south, pretending to be content enough to have scared the Scots away. But he was boasting ere he was escaped from the wood. The Scots are full of craft, and Robert Bruce, who had made himself their king, was not the man to let any foe boast he had had the better of the day. King Edward, dawdling southward, as proud as though he had accomplished such a victory as we looked for in his mighty father's time, went nearer to his ending than he had ever done as yet.

It was but a few days after the feast of Saint Michael, in that year of grace, 1322, and full six months after my flight from Pontefract, that one afternoon Hugh Miller, who had been into Alnwick on his own concerns, came galloping up to the door of the hut in which we lived with a led horse in his hand.

"Up, up, Sir Aubrey!" he cried, "there is not a moment to lose. Father Anselm calls you to come to him without delay."

Nor would he tell me more, as I, not doubting the truth of what he said, jumped on my steed, and in a trice was galloping with him down the hillside towards Alnwick town. There we did not enter, but leaving it to our right even as we crossed the Alne, bore onward to the south. And then, and not till then, did it flash across me that it was to Warkworth we were bound, and for a king's ransom to the hermit-

age which I had visited as a boy some fifteen years before. And so it was.

It was dark long ere we reached the spot, but Hugh, who seemed familiar with every inch of that broad county, left our horses at the cottage of a hind, and led me on on foot. And so at last we came to the patch of cultivated ground which men call the hermit's garden, and here Hugh, lying flat on the rock, and thrusting his head over, whistled softly, even as he had whistled that night at Pontefract when I escaped. And on the instant a light flared up, and some one called to us to come down while he held the lantern or torch or whatever it was, and in a trice I stood on the bank of the river beside the hermitage again.

"Well met, sir page!" exclaimed the hermit's jolly voice; "well met, I say. Though so many years are gone since last you favoured me with a visit, I remember your coming full well, both because of the way you swam the river in the dark, and the appetite you brought to breakfast." And he broke into a mellow laugh.

"Nay, that was your fault, most reverend father," I answered. "Never have I tasted such fare since that day."

"Well, let us hope to try again when times are quieter," he answered. "Meanwhile there is war in the air. Anselm is away, but may return at any moment, and in the mean time you are to don the armour which is upstairs in the sleeping cell. Your friends the Scots——"

"Nay, they are no friends of mine," I cried.

"So much the worse for you," he answered coolly.

"Anyway, they are on the move, and you go southwards to bear the tidings to your friend—your other friend—the king, ho, ho!" And he laughed a full round laugh as he handed me the torch and pointed to the stairs.

The cell seemed shrunken to a small, poor place as I entered it—or was it I that had grown? I had to stoop now to enter the second chamber, and when I had done so, and was looking around to find the promised armour, I stopped with a start. For there upon the second couch was set forth, clean and repaired, yet dented still and warworn, the selfsame mail that I had worn at Myton and at Boroughbridge.

"What does this mean?" I asked of Hugh, who was following close at my heel.

"Nay, you must ask of Anselm," he answered. "He may tell you, if he so listeth. For Heaven's sake, Sir Aubrey, anger him not, but do without questioning whatever he may bid."

"That will I readily," I answered, "seeing I have not forgotten to whom I owe my life—with you, of course, good Hugh."

"Nay, leave me out," he answered; "mine was but the hand, his the head."

I had scarce donned the mail, when the monk himself stood in the doorway and signed to Hugh to leave us. And now I saw that in his face was none of the tenderness that I had gathered from his voice that night at Pontefract when we parted last. He looked full sternly at me as he entered, and for words all he would say was, "Well?"

But I was minded to show him then and there

that I was ready to do as he bid. I dropped on my knee before him.

"Your blessing, father," I said. "I am here to do your bidding."

"Is that so?" he asked, with a ring of gladness in his voice. "And has misfortune really taught you wisdom, or is this yet another prelude to more madness?"

"Nay," I answered, "try me. Order, and see how I perform."

"Then listen," was his answer. "The Scots ride southward with what speed they may, seeking to surprise the king ere he shall reach York. At the mouth of this river, some three miles from here, lies stout John Craster, ready to do my bidding, or to do you a service, if you would have it that way. By traveling night and day you may be in time to warn the king, who is near Helmsley by this time, where the Scots should overtake him. This do, and for the service ask forgiveness."

"I will go right willingly," I answered, and prepared to rise.

"Not so fast, Sir Knight," he answered, as from under his robe he drew a small bundle which he unwound; "I have more to tell you."

And even as he spoke he held before my astonished eyes that very leathern bag which had been cut from my bosom by a thieving Welshman the day of my defeat.

"Are you a wizard, sir?" I asked in my surprise. Whereat he shook his head.

"Boy," he exclaimed, "you thought yourself so wise and strong that I was well minded to show you

to yourself a headstrong fool. You know that when you must go to Lancaster against my wishes, I watched over you all the time. Now that bag holds what shall win you favours from the two persons most to you on earth. When the king, for your loyal service, shall have given you his pardon, draw forth Gaveston's chain and ask the hand of Lady Alison as well, and when he shall consent, as he most surely will, show to the lady her kerchief, and win her consent too."

"But why," I asked, "was this taken from me at all?"

"Because," he said, "with this in your hand you were safe from any harm, and as the time was not ripe I was not minded you should escape by yourself. I had to take it from you. Now you can go."

He waved his hand towards the doorway, and I, without so much as asking his blessing on my enterprise, obeyed. Yet was I both puzzled and annoyed to find my liberty of action reft from my hands in this curt fashion, and had I dared would have raised my protest and questioned this masterful monk. But prudence held me, not to say my promise and the memory of the long weeks of inaction which it seemed to me I owed to my first refusal to be guided by his will. Still, as I sat in the ship through the long hours of the night, snatching a broken sleep from time to time, I coned over all these mysteries, and wondered, above other things, when it would please this strange being to reveal to me the truth.

As I left the monk and stepped down on to the river's bank below, I found the hermit ready in his boat, with Hugh Miller also, clad from head to foot in his mail, even as I was myself. Our reverend ferry-

man took us across stream with a few vigorous strokes, scarce deigning, as he did so, to address one word to me. But as I scrambled up the bank on the further side, he wished me good luck.

“I have started many a man on his enterprise this way, Sir Aubrey,” he said, as he turned to send his boat back across stream, “and some have failed, and others come by much profit through listening to my brother’s advice. See that you stray not from the course he has set you, and I trow all will be well with you this time.” And then he pushed off, and we saw him no more.

Hugh knew the road here as well as on the further side of the stream, and led me as swiftly as our heavy armour would permit us to the river where it flows beyond the town. There was no risk to any one beneath the walls of Percy’s castle now, for, though he had made his peace with the king, he was able to shut his eyes to the presence of any of his former friends. So without fear we skirted the castle wall, which at this place stretches well nigh from bank to bank, and so defends the town itself that lies within the loop made by the stream as secure from any sudden invasion of the Scots as if it were fenced throughout with walls. And on the further side we came to the river again, and striking out towards the east, followed its course until the sea was reached; and there, as the monk had told me, lay John Craster’s ship, which, on the instant of my coming, loosed and put to sea. And with a favouring breeze we went gaily onward on our journey southward, sailing without misadventure till Whitby town was reached, and there we found two horses for our better comfort, and no tidings of the

Scots. The king, they told us, lay at Byland Abbey, resting on his march ; and there, on ground which favoured them, the Scots would most surely attack, and if they could surprise our English forces, might inflict yet another defeat.

For my own part I could not think that, however fast the Scots might march, their coming could remain unknown to the king, and it was with little hope of doing what I wished to do that I set out on my long ride. From Whitby town to Pickering is over twenty miles, and thence to Byland is perhaps as many more. It was on the morning of the 13th of October that Hugh and I rode forth on our long journey, and pressing on with what speed we could, came towards nightfall to Pickering, where we rested a space, and then, after a change of horses, rode forward again to Helmsley, where our weary bodies so craved sleep that we were fain delay, meaning to ride the rest in the early morning. We found an inn, and after seeing our good steeds well cared for, lay down ourselves to rest, and slept so long that to my great dismay the sun was high in the heaven when the drawer came to bid us rise. So once again we rode forth, this time not by the highways we had followed thus far, but as straight as we could guess the road, and by our fortune we guessed it so ill that we came to a spot where the whole matter lay before us. From the north, silent and swift, we saw the Scottish host come marching down, while behind a ridge to southward, easily seen of us, but hidden from the advancing foe, lay King Edward's camp. And we could see, too, that in this last there was no expectation of the coming blow ; for, had they known how near the foe

were, they would ere this have been marshalling their array, whereas there was no sign of such a thing.

"Hugh!" I cried in dismay, "we are too late. The Scots are nearer to them than we are."

"Never despair!" he answered, as he caught my rein and turned our horses towards the ridge where lay our friends. "These Scots wot not of our coming, and while they, being many, must thread their way with care, we two may ride apace. So on, Sir Knight, and all will yet be well."

I did not pause an instant, but galloped as best I might for the camp. The enemy were nearer to it than we were, hidden by the ground, but as Hugh rightly said, a single man may make better speed than a host. And while they too came onward swiftly, we went faster than they did, and in the event did what we sought.

The English leaders were—as I afterwards learned—Richmond and my own kind De Valence, of whom the last was too well tried in war to risk anything, even in a place he deemed quite safe. It was to his foresight the English army, which lay behind the long bank from Oldstead to Wass, called in those parts the abbey bank, from Byland Abbey which lay beside it, owed its one defence—a post of men-at-arms placed in the hollow roadway which cut the bank. And even as we approached the camp, we saw the hardy Scottish archers come pouring down this road while others ran for the bank, and such was the tidings we carried to the astonished camp.

For my own part I galloped with what speed I could to where above a tent in the centre of the army there floated the banner of Pembroke, and there wind-

ed my horn. And when on the instant De Valence came hurrying forth to ask what this might mean, I stayed no longer than to tell the news, and ask where was the king.

“The king is in the abbey holding feast,” answered the earl, “and who will ride to tell him of this dire mischance?”

“That will I do, lord earl,” I answered quickly; “and meanwhile do you do what lies in you to set your powers in order, for ere many minutes are past the Scots will be swarming down on you over yonder ridge.”

“Yes, ride to tell the king,” he answered quickly. And as I galloped on, down the road his finger showed me, I heard the trumpets blaring forth their message of alarm, and the hoarse cries of the startled camp. But I could not stop to see them forming, but, followed closely by Hugh Miller, rode as for my life towards the abbey gate. Here I could see that none had any thought of a foe, for on the entry not one single sentinel kept watch, only a frightened monk came out to ask me my will.

CHAPTER XXI.

I GO NEAR HANGING.

WORDS could not have told me better than this careless guard how great a risk the king must run. So as I swung me from my saddle all the answer I would give the questioning monk, who made as if to bar the entry, was a question in turn.

"The king?" I cried. "Where is the king?"

"In the great hall holding high revel with his lords."

"Then must I to him. Do you lead the way."

"Nay, this is no time for business," he answered; "the feast is but this instant spread."

"Man, dally not with feasts or such things," I cried impatiently. "The matter is instant, and if you delay, there be many there will never feast again, for within this few minutes the Scots will be knocking at the gate."

"The Scots!" he cried, and his cheek grew pale, for in those unhallowed wars the fat abbeyes had to bear their share of loss.

"Yes, the Scots. Where is the king, I ask?"

He made no more demur, but led me to the great hall or buttery, where were gathered together those

who for the nonce sat with the king at meat. But he was not minded to go further than the doorway, and left me to cross the hall alone, which I did hastily, to all men's surprise. For a knight in battered armour, with vizor set and axe in hand, is no fit guest at revels such as these. Perhaps if they had seen me earlier some would have risen to stay my progress, for such an entry boded ill to the king, but ere any could do more than just pluck at my cloak I had shaken all off, and kneeled upon the dais step close by his Grace.

Now Edward loved not interruptions such as these, and his face grew dark and puckered into a frown as he saw me, though he little guessed who it was that knelt before him.

"Whom have we here?" he cried.

I threw my vizor upwards as I answered,

"'Tis Aubrey de Mauleverer, my liege."

"Whose life," he answered, with that evil smile I knew so well, "stands forfeit for treason, and for wagging war against his king. Truly, Sir Knight, you have chosen a strange time for thrusting your head into the hangman's noose."

"Nay, time enough for that hereafter, my liege, should any of us survive this day. But I have ridden hard from Northumberland to warn your grace that the false Scots are upon you—nay, within a few minutes they will be hammering at the gate."

"The Scots? Impossible!" cried a hundred voices, and the king himself, who was no coward at his worst, turned on me his glittering eyes again.

"A sorry jest, sirrah, contrived, I doubt not, to wring from us in a panic forgiveness of your mis-

deeds. But it shall not serve you, for you shall most truly hang."

"Nay," I answered, rising, "time enough for that. At least will I first strike one more blow for England and my king. Hark! What is that?"

And even as I spoke there came borne faintly down the autumn breeze the sounds of strife on the distant ridge. For an instant there was silence, when you could have heard the rustle of a silken gown, so still had the hall become, and then their humour changed, and the cry was all "To arms!" As for the king, he strode to where I stood.

"Lead me to some vantage spot, sir traitor," he said, "where mine own eyes may judge this thing."

But in the courtyard the sounds were clearer still, and dropping on my knees I besought the king to fly.

"Ride swift into safety, my liege," I said; "unarmed and cumbered by this rabble, you can do nothing here, and there is no time to marshal your guards, save those whom my good esquire has posted by the gate. De Valence is hard set by this on yonder ridge, and, listen!—they are coming even now."

Indeed we could hear upon the causeway outside the tramp of armed men. And at that instant some grooms led forth the king's own horse, and I held his stirrup while he mounted.

"A pretty figure for a king to cut!" he said, as he eyed me darkly. "Your tidings were worth more half an hour earlier, sirrah. What will you do now?"

"Hold this place while I can," I answered, "and so give you time to make good your escape. But go, my liege, they will be on us directly, and then you cannot escape."

"Yes, go," cried others, who like their master had gained their steeds and only waited for his word to flee. Then the king turned on me a mocking smile once more.

"Strike hard, Sir Aubrey," he said quietly. "And remember that to die in battle is not worse than another fate; for, by my father's head, I'll hang you for your treason so soon as I shall find you again."

And turning his horse's head he soon was gone. And in good time, for I had scarce had time to set my few men-at-arms in order, and to occupy the abbey wall as strongly as our slender numbers would admit, when a great host of Scottish horsemen set upon the gateway, and with their axes strove to break it down. And it was well that they believed they had the king safe in ward, for they never thought of looking for him elsewhere, and we for our part were able, thanks to the strong walls and the stout oak set with iron of which the gate was formed, to hold our own as long as there was any resistance on the ridge. For there, too, things were gone amiss, the hardy Scots making the most of the surprise, and presently the English, taken at a disadvantage, broke and fled, and all the battle raged around our post.

And now I did not see what cause there was to hold out longer, but sounded a parley, and a Scottish earl whom I did not know, but whom they told me was no other than the Bruce's trusted henchman, Randolph, rode forward to arrange the terms. And when he saw but one poor knight, he was puzzled I trow, and asked why King Edward had not sent one of his rank. "King Edward," I answered, "is half way to York by this, I hope; and, as for earls, I am the only knight,

who with my esquire and a couple of hundred stout fellows of the king's guard have held this place, and will hold it longer unless you grant us terms."

"And what terms would you have?" he asked, seemingly amazed alike at my story and my assurance.

"Our lives, our liberty, our arms, and one hour's start," I answered; and hearing this, he laughed outright.

"By Saint Andrew, Sir Knight," he cried, "you shall have your way! Your lives for your bravery, your liberty for your loyalty to your king, your arms for the use you have made of them, and the hour's start for your craft. I pledge you my word to this."

He held out his hand as he spoke, and I grasped it readily enough, and bade my fellows be gone as swiftly as they might. Then, cordially saluting the gallant Scot, I, too, set out on horseback, with Hugh at my side.

"Hugh," I asked, when we had ridden a matter of a mile or so, "know you the road?"

"Not I; but if we face due southward, we must be right, I trow." And seeing nothing better for it, I took his advice, and we fared southward as fast as our weary steeds would carry us.

It had been past midday when we rode from the abbey, and it was getting near the sunset when we entered a great wood. Now both of us were very weary, for we had since we left the ship at Whitby ridden some forty to fifty miles, and fought two hours, taking little rest between; and so, when presently we came to a forester's hut, we halted, hoping to find both accommodation for ourselves and for our steeds. But if we looked to find any one there we were disappointed,

for the place was deserted, probably on the rumour of the battle and the coming Scots, for we found in the hut both food ready spread and some corn, which we could give to our horses. Deeming it unlikely that the foe would come thither for some hours at least—for we had left them busy plundering the abbey and the English camp—we determined we would rest, watching by turns. So I bade Hugh sleep first, and I would wake him when half the night was gone, and take my rest.

The moon had just set when I woke Hugh, and laid me down in my turn to sleep. I cautioned him to keep watchful, never doubting that he would, but, as it chanced, I found I had underestimated the power for wakefulness of a thrice-weary man, who has just tasted of sleep. Hugh says he tried to keep his watch, but I doubt not that he was slumbering soon after myself, who lay there in such heavy sleep that I heard no sound of a troop of horsemen coming along that road, who had missed their way, and stopped at this habitation to inquire. Their cries woke Hugh, who in his sleepy state supposed them to be the Scots again, and, diving through the crowd of them, was soon safe in the wood, where they could hardly follow in the dark. This done, the honest fellow—now well awakened—thought of me, and knew that I must be taken.

Yet neither he nor I had any thought of what a taking it was. For when presently one of the party entering shook me roughly from my sleep, and bade me come forth to tell the baron, his master, his road, I supposed my danger was over, whereas it was but just begun. I had looked to meet with friendly Eng-

lishmen, whereas I stepped right into the jaws of, perhaps, the one man living who wished me evil.

How Maurepart recognized me so quickly I cannot say, unless it be that the eye of hate was ever keen to spy out its foes. But almost ere I answered him, explaining that I was a chance comer—I did not speak of the battle, which was fortunate for me, as it proved in the event—he knew me, and laughed aloud for joy.

“Now, by’r Ladye!” he cried, “this is a fortunate meeting, Sir William. Know you this spriggart?”

The knight who rode beside him, a tall, grave man, replied that he did not.

“Well, then, I will inform you,” cried the other jocularly, as one who finds a pleasure in his thoughts. “This is a traitor, taken with Lancaster at Boroughbridge that day, who has since escaped, on whose felon head a reward is set. And, seeing that he is an outlaw, I take it it is competent for us to end his crimes this night.”

“In what fashion, Sir Baron?”

“By hanging him to the nearest tree.”

“And his name?”

“Mauleverer.”

“What? The same that——”

“Ay, the very same.”

“Then, Maurepart,” replied the stranger knight, “an’ I were you, I should pause ere I laid violent hands upon him. Our liege the king will do that fast enough when he shall catch him, and, for my part, I would counsel you to bring him with you, and leave King Edward to deal with him as he thinks fittest. Men might say after that you had vented your private despite.”

My enemy, for such he clearly was, hesitated for a moment, and then, his craft mastering his hate, he must needs agree.

"Have it your way, Sir William," he said. "Where is Hans Reinhart?"

And at the word a great burly German stepped to the front.

"Bind them together on one horse," quoth the baron, "back to back, and see this caitiff is well gagged, lest he sicken our ears with appeals we may not listen to."

And so the thing was done, nor did I protest, lest I should haply goad him to change his mind. For, in obedience to the words of Father Anselm, I was ready enough to come to the king, and saw no quicker way than this. Yet had I cause to rue my silence speedily, for soon I found that these men knew nothing of the battle fought that day, and were riding to Byland, where they thought the king was, into the very jaws of the Scots. Nor could I warn them, even were I minded to do it, for my mouth was gagged, and thus we rode forward on our road to I knew not what.

An hour we rode or more, keeping not the road by which I had come, but still through the wood. And I was full of wonder as to how these Germans—for nearly all the troop were Maurepart's foreign hirelings—would be greeted by the Scots, and how it was like to go with me, when without warning the wood on either side of us became alive with half-naked figures, Scottish clansmen in fact, and a loud voice bade us halt, for we were surrounded on all sides. And as if to give a point to the words, a dozen or so of these rapsallions laid hands on the horses' bridles of

the leaders of the troop, and forced them back, while the voice repeated the command, with the significant addition that we were outnumbered by a hundred to one.

"If that be so," said Maurepart, right sullenly, "we must fain do as you bid us. But tell me, who be ye that do not scruple to use violence to the lieges of good King Edward, riding to join his Grace at Byland?"

"Nay, sir, you are too late for that," replied the speaker. "King Edward fled from Byland early yesterday, and we are in pursuit of him even now."

"Who speaks to me?" asked Maurepart. "Your voice seems familiar. Show yourself forthwith, and let me know my foe."

Now, though my lips were bound, I could both see and hear. I had followed this colloquy with interest, wondering how it would chance with me, and who the unseen speaker was. And now a dozen torches burst into light, and a tall dark knight, whose proud face was set and stern, stalked into view. And as he did so a startled cry from De Maurepart drew my attention, for it was a cry of fear.

"The Douglas!" he cried in terror-stricken accents.

"Yes, Maurepart, the Douglas, as you say," was the stern reply. "And right glad am I to meet you. There has been a score between us this twenty years or more, Sir Knight, or baron as they say yon fickle king has dubbed you of late. Shall we begin our reckoning forthwith?"

Whereat De Maurepart fell a-trembling so that he could scarce speak.

"I was not guilty, Douglas, by my faith I was not."

"Your faith?" was the scornful answer. "It was by trusting your faith but once that I have gone sorrowing all these years. I cannot bring the dead to life, but I can punish, and by Saint Andrew I will. Bind yonder felon, some of you."

But no one had a rope, till one of his fellows, spying me, suggested an exchange. And Douglas forthwith ordered me to be freed and brought to him, and greeted me with most courteous words.

"Had yonder caitiff been any other than the man he is," he said, "I should have questioned your honesty, Sir Knight. But to be prisoner to Maurepart in itself argues you to be a just man. Why has he bound you thus?"

"My lord," I answered, "ask himself. Twice already he was minded to slay me, once when I was a mere boy, and again but lately through his influence with the king. Not an hour since he would have hanged me, but for the kindness of this knight, who will tell you if all I say is true."

"Why," cried a voice I seemed to know, "it is the knight who held the abbey stoutly this very day," and Randolph came forward in his turn.

"And what is more," said yet another, and this time I knew the deep tones of my sometime fellow-traveller Sir Angus, "it is that same Mauleverer of whom I spoke to you, my lord, some time ago."

Then there happened a curious thing, for at the mention of my name the Douglas face grew blacker still, and I thought that I, too, stood in his ill graces. But it was not so, for turning to the baron whom they

were binding even then, he cried in a voice of thunder—

“So, caitiff, you would slay the son as you slew the father. But, as I live, you shall not have the chance. Bind him and ride with him to the northward, Angus, and see that he escape not by the way.”

“And my good friend here?” asked the man he spoke to, touching my arm.

“He shall go free, seeing it was this caitiff’s villainy that threw him into our hands. We will not use his misfortune to his hurt.”

“Then by your favour, kinsman,” said Sir Angus, coolly, “I will go with him to set him on his way to York, lest he should miss his road again, or suffer further despite from our kindly Scots. I trow some other can look after yonder carrion for you for the nonce.”

“As you will, Angus,” replied the Douglas, as he turned to where the other knight stood. “And you, sir, what is your name?”

“William de Harcla.”

“Brother of the Earl of Carlisle?”

“Yes, sir earl.”

“Then you, too, must be my guest for a few days’ space. We have it on the best authority that your brother is like to fall under the anger of the fickle king, and you will be safer with us. Sir Aubrey,” he added, turning to me, “once in my life, unwittingly, I did you a great injury, for which I can never atone. I crave your pardon.”

“You have it right freely, my lord.”

“Nay, hear me first,” he answered sadly, “ere you pardon one, of the magnitude of whose wrong-doing

you know naught. Your father and your mother owed their deaths to me."

"To you!" I cried, falling back a pace or so.

"Yes," he said gravely. "It is even so. That caitiff yonder hated your father, though to do us all justice your mother's death was an accident we none of us had foreseen. Now I did not—I had known and loved the good knight, who in the wretched wars fomented by the late King Edward—on his name be curses—had ever been a kind and courteous foe. I had seen much of him, and we were friends, so much so that it had been my task to make his border charge as easy as I might with honesty. But on one evil day there came to me this Maurepart, whom I knew not then, and with lying tongue he represented that something had chanced which had no existence save in his own crafty brain. In a moment of passion I bade my following burn Widdrington about your father's ears for what I deemed his breach of faith, and when it was done I learned, too late, that I had been deceived. For which crime this felon shall answer yet."

"My lord," I said, "if it were so, I cannot see where you or yours should take the blame. And if you are minded to remove for ever from my path my enemy, why, that alone should earn my warmest thanks. While he lives here I cannot rest in safety or in hope. If he is gone, I well may look to make my peace with the king."

"And so you shall," he said. "And this I promise you, that no ransom shall free him from my charge. He has made me suffer for so long, that I may fairly make him feel in turn. And now, Sir Aubrey, fare thee well. Here ends my task, and though Angus and

the gallant Randolph ride to the walls of York, I must hie me back to my king. Your hand, sir. This meeting eases me of a sorrow that I have borne for years, which ends this night in kindness, thanks to you."

And so we parted, Douglas and I. And I would add that he truly kept his word, though not quite as he meant. For Maurepart, who was speedily attainted by King Edward, as I shall have to show, died of despair within a brief space of this time, and never crossed my path again, much to my comfort, seeing he was the only enemy I had.

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW KING EDWARD BESTED ME.

THUS passed from my life for ever, though I knew it not at the time, the man who had been my bitterest foe. Into the darkness he rode—he and his troop of German hirelings—in the Black Douglas's keeping, and I was left with Randolph and Sir Angus, and hardly knew whether or no I was a prisoner myself.

I asked my old acquaintance which it was to be, and he answered with a gay smile that it was just how I chose to regard it.

“You shall be free so soon as ever we can set you on your way, Sir Aubrey,” quoth he, “but not just yet. Our roving bands are spread all over the land ’twixt here and York, and might not treat you quite so civilly as we shall. For your own safety you must remain our prisoner till to-morrow’s dawn, when we will ride with you part of your journey to York, now distant scarce ten miles, and then leave you free to go whither you list, and to receive the rich reward your king will doubtless bestow upon you for yesterday’s work.”

I was not so sure myself of what that same reward would be. But I held my peace, fearing they might

be tempted to detain me if they knew the truth. So as we strode up and down, wrapped in our cloaks, for the night was chill, I asked the knight that self-same question he would not answer before.

"Now tell me, kind Sir Angus," said I, "for what reason you have ever shown such interest in me and my fortunes."

"I' faith," he answered carelessly, "I thought you would have guessed it long ere this, having heard my kinsman's confession of the wrong he did you years ago. I knew your story from him long before he told you, and I, too, was grieved, and fain would help you if it lay in me. But that is past, though not, I trust, the friendship between us too."

"No, indeed," I answered, as we cordially grasped each other's hands; "that will last while I breathe."

"And fain would I think, too," he answered, "that for the future you will think more kindly of us Scots, seeing the wrong we did you years ago was yonder felon's doing, not ours."

This, too, I promised him, and so the night wore on, till with the first sign of the coming dawn, Randolph called to his troop to mount. And then I saw that the Douglas's had been no idle boast, for he had carried with him a goodly company, and those that still remained were full four hundred stout men-at-arms and knights.

The day broke cold and chill as we rode from this place towards the south, but when some two hours later Randolph drew rein and called his fellows to him, the autumn sun shone strong upon that goodly array. And here he offered me his hand in friendship, and bade me go my ways.

"Here must we part, Sir Aubrey," he said. "My work is over, and I must hie me back to my king. Go you whither you list, and all be well with you. Perchance we may cross swords again some day in our nations' quarrel, and though God shall so will it, I trust the kindly feelings which lie between us now may never be forgotten."

"God rule it so, sir earl," I answered, and then bade farewell to Sir Angus in turn. But fate willed that I should never see the Bruce's daring comrade again, though in the more peaceful days that followed my good friend Sir Angus has more than once graced my board.

I was in no mood to tarry, for a strange longing held me to know the best or worst. I must go to York, and there receive that which fate had in store for me, and soon I was riding forward all alone towards the place where I knew I should find the king.

But not alone for long, for through the wood there presently came galloping two horses and one man. And this was Hugh, my faithful friend, who with our horses (left behind by the baron's party) had followed at safe distance all the way, and now was come to share my recovered freedom. And right glad was I to see him there.

So on we rode in leisurely fashion, for the going was none of the best, and though we had now a led horse (for I was riding the German ritter's horse which Angus Douglas had given me for myself), I was minded to spare our cattle so far as I could. And hence it was not far from noon when the grey tower of St. Peter's church rose above our view, and

soon we reached the well-remembered gateway leading from the city by the walls of St. Mary's Abbey, the bar they call the Bootham, through which we passed unquestioned, nay, almost without a curious glance from the warder who held watch there, which was scarce wonderful, seeing that since the previous day many a hundred fugitives had ridden for the sheltering walls of York.

And now as the goal was reached, my heart beat the faster, for the knowledge that soon King Edward and I would stand face to face. On then we rode, up St. Peter's gate, and the Feast gate, and so to the Ness gate at last, beyond which frowned the grim gateway of the castle, where I was to find the king.

The warders on the gate looked curiously at me when I asked where I should find him. They knew me well enough, and perhaps marvelled at my daring thus to thrust my head into the very jaws of the lion. But go I would, and I passed onward to the great hall, where one of them must needs block my further advance.

"The king is busy," he said.

"Very well," I answered, "I can wait my turn."

"God grant, Sir Knight," he answered, "that yours may be a more fortunate one than this."

I asked him what he meant.

"They are trying the Earl of Carlisle for his life," he said.

"Andrew de Harcla!" I exclaimed, as my heart sank within me. "Why, I had deemed that no man stood higher with his Grace."

"That was six months ago," he answered sadly.

"Where have you been, Sir Aubrey, that you know

not the truth? The Earl of Carlisle stands charged with trafficking with the false Scots, whereby his Grace came yesterday by serious despite, and they say that he is like to die this day."

"Where are they?" I asked.

"In the council chamber beyond the great hall."

"Then let me wait outside and hear the ending," I said, as I brushed past him. But none the less, my heart sank within me, for I knew King Edward, and how his cruel nature battened on such deeds as this. Andrew de Harcla, whom I had left the most powerful man at the court, able to ask without risk of refusal the highest reward, was now, but six short months having passed since that day, like to lose his head. Well might I tremble, well might men call King Edward fickle, seeing how soon he turned his wrath against the man who had perchance saved his throne, and well might Harcla, did he but think, recall the dead Thomas Plantagenet's warning, and bitterly regret the day when he brushed aside the offers of a man who, be his faults what they might, at all events was true to his word.

I had not long to wait, for presently they threw open the door, and led the doomed man forth. And as he saw me, he started, and fell a-trembling.

"Sir Aubrey de Mauleverer," he cried. "I heard your name but now. And are you come to see one who once was minded to do you an injury pass to his doom?"

"Now Heaven forbid, lord earl!" I answered. "That were far from my thoughts. Chance brings me here—chance and my own concerns, and when I entered by the gate yonder I little thought to hear

such tidings as these, which are as unwelcome to me almost as to your closest friend."

"I do believe you, sir," he answered. "And, now I think of it, they told me that yesterday his Grace owed his escape to your address. I trust your fortune may bring you less harm than mine has, Sir Knight. For methinks that to some of us the king's frown were safer than his smile."

He moved away as he spoke, the doomsman before him, with the edge of his sword turned to his victim, and I could not but cry—

"God be with you, Sir Andrew!" Whereat he turned to me and smiled and waved his hand.

"Give me your prayers, Sir Aubrey," he said. "They are all that I need now."

And with those words he passed from my sight, and I, turning to the knight who stood before the doorway, craved to see the king.

They did not open to me at once—nay, through the door I could hear as if high words passed within. But presently the knight returned with a scared face and bade me enter.

"Now Heaven guide your matters aright, Sir Aubrey," he whispered, ere he threw back the door. "These are not men, but tigers, and they have tasted blood." With which ill-omened words he thrust me in.

Around that board were seated a score or so of knights and earls, of whom I had last seen some in the great hall of Pontefract that day Earl Thomas died. And in the centre, with the Earl of Kent upon his right, and the two Spencers on his left, sat King Edward, his handsome face flushed with anger, and

gathered to an evil frown. And as I saw it I repented me of the haste that brought me there. But now there was no escape from it, and I was fain put the best face on the matter that I could. Yet I confess I thought that I was to die, and feeling that the boldest mien were the best, I made my obeisance to the king, and waited till he spoke.

"Ha, traitor! have I caught thee?" he cried. "What folly brought thee here this day?"

"Nay, I am no traitor, my liege," I answered boldly. "And, as for my coming, I had your Grace's own command for it."

"Methinks you are grown full scrupulous to obey the commands of your king, sirrah," he answered. "Since when came the change? But first tell me how and when you had any such command from me?"

"Yesterday, my liege," I answered boldly. "Your Grace told me that so soon as you were safe I was to come to you."

"What else, Sir Knight; what else?" he cried fiercely.

"In truth, your Grace was in a hurry and I do not remember all you said, but if my memory serves me aright, you did promise, I think, to hang me when you caught me."

"Ah! Now we have it. I promised to hang you, and by my father's head I will. Your life was forfeit six months since, and so you are the better by full half a year of life you deserved not. Go hang you shall, seeing your rank does not merit the headsman's sword. That is my answer to all traitors. You came in an unlucky time, sirrah, when I had just sped one

felon, and had the way of it in my mind. What say you, my lords?"

Of them all only one answered, and that was the elder Spencer—the Earl of Winchester as they had made him, and little did I thank him for his words.

"His life is most assuredly forfeit for his treason in the late Earl Thomas's time. Yet were your Grace minded to remember his service yesterday—I would not urge it. Yet——"

"No, no," roared the king, interrupting him; "first come first served. His treason merits death, and he shall have it. Now, had he served me first, and sinned afterwards, it would have been the other way. Take him away and hang him."

And hanged I should have been by this perfidious king whom I had saved that self-same hour the previous day, had I not drawn out of its case Piers Gaveston's chain, and cast myself at his feet.

"A moment, my liege," I cried, "and look upon this token. I claim your promise made to me ten years ago. One life you gave me, and the life I ask is my own."

And a great hush fell upon them all as he fell back trembling as he looked upon this token sent him by his dead friend.

"You are right," he said, in a very different voice to that in which he had addressed me thus far. "I had forgotten. Nay, why did you turn traitor, seeing I was minded to serve you? Your life is yours right freely. Take it and see that you offend not again."

I knelt and kissed the hand he extended to me in token of his royal forgiveness, though I little liked to do it, so had hatred grown up in my heart against

him. Then I rose, and stood there making no sign as if to go.

“Out; get you gone, sirrah,” cried the Earl of Winchester, who seemed some way to be strangely displeased with the ending of it. “You have your life, what more would you ask?”

“I’ faith I have my life, sir,” I answered, and could scarce restrain myself from adding, “and small thanks to you.” “But just now his Grace was pleased to speak of some small service I did him yesterday, for which he was minded to name a reward.”

It did my heart good to see how the faces of that needy crew fell as I spoke these words. They thought that they were ridded of a claimant to such favours as the king was minded to bestow, and here, as I had foreseen, I had my pardon and could still ask for more.

Yet to my thinking the king did not seem altogether displeased.

“A clever fellow, by my father’s head!” he cried. “Now, I was minded to let your life be a full quit-tance of all claims, but since I have myself just said the fault and the service were distinct, I must not go back on my royal word. So, sirrah, open that lucky bag and let us see what else is in it.”

And he pointed to the leathern bag from which I had just drawn Piers Gaveston’s chain, and which lay half exposed upon my cuirass. And I, thinking no harm would come of it, and that it might save me words, did as he bade me, and drew forth Alison’s kerchief in its turn.

“I knew it!” cried the king, whose mood was changing, as he lay back in his seat and laughed

aloud. "I might have guessed there was a woman in it. Well, sirrah, who is this wench?"

"I fegs, your Grace," I answered, "seeing the example set me by some of this worshipful company, I was minded to strengthen my fortunes by a suitable marriage—always with your Grace's permission."

"Hear him!" he cried again. "Now, by my faith, this is fine sport. Well, who is the lady, Sir Knight?"

"The Lady Alison, my liege," I answered, and as I said it his face grew clouded again.

"You would fly high, Sir Aubrey," he replied. "Besides, there is another to share in her giving. Where is the Baron de Maurepart? We expect him hourly, seeing he wrote that he was coming to our aid with all his powers. You must wait till he comes."

"Then the lady will be long ere she weds," I said, most imprudently, as it chanced in the end.

"How is that?" he asked quickly.

"De Maurepart is gone to Scotland with the Black Douglas," I answered, and he forthwith bade me explain.

So I, nothing loath, told him all, just as I have set it down here, and he heard me patiently to the end. But when I had done, the ordering of it all came quicker than any of us had thought.

"So that is how it lies," he said, and on his face there was that evil smile which ever was to me as the warning of some coming hurt. "This alters matters greatly. You can have the lady, Sir Knight."

Now I did not know then, as I have learned since, that another had the promise of her hand for his son, so I could not understand the murmur of surprise that ran round the needy, greedy throng of hangers-on.

Nay, more, the Earl of Winchester could not repress a protest.

"My liege," he began, "surely you have forgotten——"

But the king cut him short.

"I have forgotten nothing, my lord," he said, and his glittering smile was on me as he spoke. "You shall have the lady, Sir Aubrey, but not De Maurepart's lands. I know the man, and guess he was a traitor, as his friend De Harcla was. Therefore his lands are forfeit, and there is no heritage to come to his niece. Yes, you may mate her, if you still think the marriage will go to strengthen your fortune."

Thus did that faithless king outwit me, and, knowing his mood, I turned on my heel to go. I was but an infant in the hands of such a man, powerless to complain of getting what I had asked. But I carried my head high as before, and as I went from his presence cried, "God save your Grace!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ENDING OF IT ALL.

IT was in this fashion that my fortune was snatched from my hand, even at the moment when I deemed I had it fast. And when I was outside and had the time to think of it all, I could not deny that I myself was well through with it. I had my life, I had my liberty, I had my love, all three of which I might most easily have lost, and if Alison was to come to me penniless, even as I came to her, well—she was not the damsel that I had ever thought her if she would grieve much for that. Yet when I went to seek her and to learn at her hands her answer to my plea, I own I was sorry that the king's greed for his favourites—for that was what he meant, as well I knew—aided by her false uncle's treason and my own admission, when I had better far have held my tongue, should be leagued in this fashion to rob her of her own. Still, it might have fared worse with us both than it did.

I say I sought her out to ask her will. And presently I found her in the private garden used only by the queen and her ladies, and a privileged few, of whom in happier days I had made one. She was alone, sitting in the bright sunshine of that warm

October day, and when she saw me she sprang to her feet as one might do that sees a spirit from another world.

“Sir Aubrey !” she cried.

“Yes, even so,” I answered, and then, seeing how she trembled, I took her hand and led her back to her bench again. “Alison,” I said, “I have news for you. I have asked of the king your hand in marriage, and he has given it to me, if you will but consent.”

I am no scribe to set down here her answer, or to tell one hundredth part of what we said. But this I know, that she had sobbed out her confession of the love she bore me with her sweet head resting on my battered armour, and I had told her how all that I had risked had been for her sake, and we had promised many things and planned what we would do, ere I remembered what I had to tell.

“Sweet love,” I said, in some perplexity how I was to break the news to her, “there was a condition—at least not a condition, and yet what alters our condition, and your condition most of either——”

“Now, out upon you, Sir Knight; but what you say is neither sense nor grammar,” she exclaimed. “What would you tell me?”

“Alison, you know that I am poor?” I asked.

“That is no hindrance,” she answered, “seeing that I have, or shall have some day, enough for us both.”

“Therein it lies,” I answered; “for if the truth be known you are as poor as I am myself this day.”

“How can that be?”

“Why, the king has forfeited all your lands.”

“Because you would marry me?”

"No, it is not so!" I exclaimed quickly, wishing to put upon it the best face that I could; "but it seems your uncle has turned traitor with the Scots, and stands attainted, and with him all his lands, which therefore, so the king says, are not his to give to you."

"And is it so, and is my dear home granted to some stranger? Well, then, so be it, as Heaven wills it so. And after all, dear love, I have my husband, of whom no man shall say hereafter that he sought his wife for what she had to give."

And then when my honesty, and the memory of how I had put it to the king, held me tongue-tied, she placed her fair arms round my neck, and for the first of many times kissed away the frown that gathered willy nilly at my gloomy thoughts.

"Honour stands first, Sir Knight," she whispered; "and then love. If both be perfect, surely we are rich enough."

What I might have answered I know not, for I never had the chance, seeing there came to us an interruption we had not looked for. There close before us stood the king, and on his arm leaned the queen, and on his handsome face there sat a smile.

"Sweetheart," he said to the beautiful lady who called him husband, and whom, alas! he had ever used so ill, "you are justified. These are two foolish folks who think that so they have each other that were goods enough. Perchance, as the years pass on and they grow wiser, they may rue this day, but now I trow the sun shines brighter for them than it ever shone before. Well is it for you, my children, that a king is rightfully his people's father. Lady, the

queen has told me she will charge herself with your dower, seeing that"—and here his face grew evil again—"we learn you are but poorly blessed with this world's goods. Sir Aubrey de Mauleverer, you are a very modest man to deem the hand of any silly wench reward enough for a king's liberty won by your own stout arm. But Edward of Canarvon knows what he owes to himself. They tell me you are of Northumberland. Is it even so?"

"Your Grace speaks sooth," I answered, wondering where his humour would lead this strange being next.

"I chance to have heard this morning that the constable of one of my castles has thought the hospitality of the Scottish king too tempting, or his own misdeeds too glaring to make his life quite safe. Be that as it may, I hereby appoint you to the vacant post, knowing that the man who could hold Byland Abbey till his king's safety was assured, is little like to yield a stronghold to any number of false Scots. Be you my new constable, with three knights' fees for your use."

He turned and led the queen away before I had time to thank him, and it was not till afterwards that I learned that Dunstanborough was the place he meant.

.

It was in the Church of Saint Mary's Abbey that the knot was tied, by the Lord Abbot himself, that very Alan de Nesse who had been Prior when Alison and I first met, and both the king and the queen graced our nuptials, and my dear Lord Pembroke, and stout John Chester, and Sir Hugh Miller, my new

deputy, knighted by the king for his share in that business of Byland Abbey, and many another as well. Scarce would men have thought that beneath the outward gaieties of that splendid court there lurked the festering sores which were to break forth within so short a space into trouble for all men, except, perhaps, myself. And then the king, who perchance saw the coming trouble, in his newborn kindness for me, which I never gave him time to cool, must needs have me hie me to Dunstanborough forthwith, and I was fain to obey. And there from my own people, not forgetting Father Peter, now grown an aged man, but still the chaplain, and stout John Craster, ever my kindest friend, and many another, we met a welcome as warm as only the honest north can give us, where men's hearts seem to grow kinder and less crafty than in the more artificial air of the court. And presently, on a truce being named, there came to us Sir Angus Douglas as our guest, who made me promise that he should stand sponsor to my eldest son, which, alack! he never was, seeing no child has blessed our union, Alison's and mine.

One other guest we had, or rather visitor to me, for he would never see my wife. They brought me word one day that Anselm was come, and would wait my coming to the Rumbel Kern. And so I went, wondering what brought him. And if I was minded to take credit for the skilful way in which I had managed my business, the words froze on my lips as I saw his face.

"Aubrey Mauleverer," he cried, "you are, after all, but a fool!"

"How is that, father?" I asked.

"You have let a fair face spoil your life."

"Nay, that can hardly be, seeing that never yet was man more fitly wed."

He wrung his hands for answer, and then bade me listen while he said his say ere he should go, never to return.

"Listen!" he cried, "and let me tell you, since you are now so sunk in sloth that you cannot even ask of me the tidings that once you were ready to bargain your freedom for. You are a true Mauleverer—careless, ever sanguine of your fortunes, ever missing the chances that came your way. There never was but one Mauleverer who could look to the sennight's sennight; and that one was *me*."

"You!" I exclaimed. "And are you of my own blood?"

"I am," he answered; "nearer far than you dream. I called your father son. I am an old man now, with nearly ninety summers gone over my head; but when I was your age I stood with Earl Simon at Evesham, where the liberties of this England were risked and lost. My lands were forfeited for what they called my treason, and passed from hand to hand till they became this De Maurepart's, stolen from the girl you have, in defiance of my hopes, made your wife. For close on sixty years I have been scheming to restore the faded glories of my house, but neither your father nor yourself——"

"Stay," I said swiftly, for now I knew it all I was a little embittered to think how nearly the great estates which had been my forefathers' had been mine again, and a little angry, too, that he should take to himself so much more than his share of our family

wit. "Stay, and hear me, too. You said but this instant that you were the only one of all our family that ever looked ahead of you. Now, if this were so, it was but an ill turn you did us when you made all the mischief at Evesham, which was our ruin—my poor father's and mine, and seeing you made the mischief, it ill beseems you to look to us for the repairs. Nay more, when you attack my lady wife you touch my honour, so that all being——"

"Boy, respect my grey hairs. It is not seemly to bandy words with your grandsire in this way."

"Seeing how new the joint is to me," I answered, "you must fain excuse me if it works stiffly at first. But as you will tell me everything, answer one question, I beg. We Mauleverers—were we always of knightly rank?"

"Nay more than that," he answered proudly. "I was called the Baron of Swaledale in my youth, and looked to be a belted earl had but De Montfort——"

"In fact, ambition ruined you, like many another man," I answered. "Well, that contents me, since I come of an ancient stock. Now, see here, grandsire, I am well content as I am; and if it suit you to rest yourself for the few years that are left to you——"

He shook his head angrily.

"I want none of your charity," he said. "Had it been in my own castle then, perhaps—but now—the Church shall have her own."

And gathering his robe around him, he walked away. Nor did I ever see him again, nor learn the truth of what he said, but Alison, who knew her home right well, has told me that in the valley the

story always held that the Sir Reginald de Mauleverer, who was said to have fallen at Evesham, was alive, and would come again to his own some day. It was this that made De Maurepart hate me and my father as he did. And there we left the legend, for I was well content to rest things as they were. I had my wife, my home, the rough plenty of the North, and kind friends enough for any man. And better still, I held my place in quiet and undisturbed, through all the storms that swept over our land; and though the new king has often asked me to come to court if I cared to, I have ever replied that the watching of this castle takes all of one man's care. And so he has left me undisturbed, though not without many a reminder of his knowledge of the love I bore the mother whom he turned against of necessity—not of his own free will.

The few travellers from the south who pass by Dunstanborough call it a poor bleak place, and marvel how it is that I live here so well content. But they, perchance, have not seen the things that I have, or they might think better of the peaceful haven where, by God's mercy, I look to end my days. Nor do they know of Alison, or of the great love that there is between us, or of the warm hearts who look to me, who am but the king's deputy after all, as others look to their fendal lord. I say the storms that have shaken thrones to nothing these late years have left my peace untouched, and I thank God that it is so. King Edward is gone, and the Lady Isabella, and Pembroke, and old John Chester, who ended his days by my fireside, like the faithful old dog he was. New men are arisen around a new king, and a brighter

era has dawned like unto that of King Edward.
But the news of the outer world I once so long
to see comes to me but seldom—praise be to Him
that it is so.

Only this afternoon Sir Hugh and I stood by the
Rumbel Kern to see the spray clouds glistening above
it in the autumn sun. And Hugh, the faithful friend
of my lifetime, thinks as I do—that, bleak or not,
there is no place like Dunstanborough, no hearts like
our Northumbrians, no folly such as that of the man
who leaves his peaceful home to risk the crosses of
the outer world.

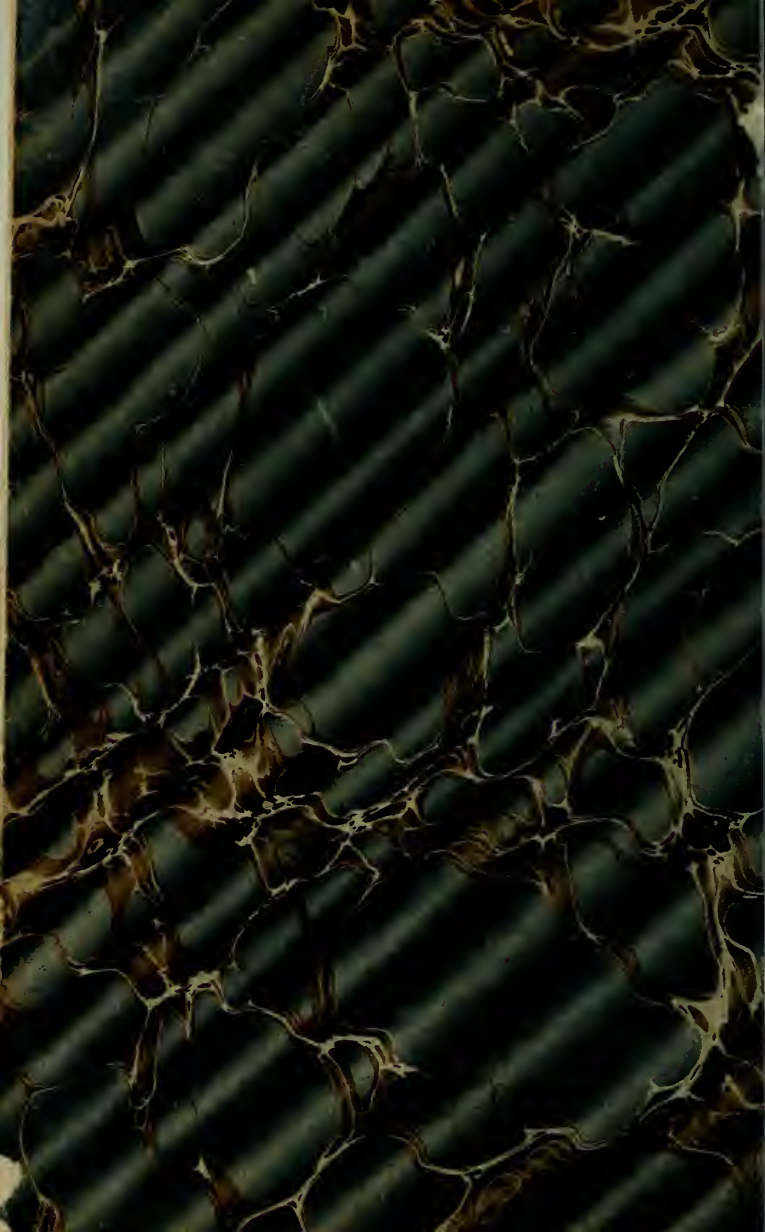
END OF THE CHRONICLE.

EDITOR'S NOTE.

FROM an entry in the oldest existing register of burials in Warkworth church it would appear that Sir Aubrey de Mauleverer, Constable of Dunstanborough Castle, was buried in the church beside his wife, Dame Alison, who had predeceased him by only four years or so, on Christmas Eve, in the year 1385. He is described as being ninety-two years of age, quite blind, and having performed his duties by deputy for several years past. The age is incorrect, if his own account is true, seeing that he tells us he was born in 1299, which would bring him to his eighty-seventh year.

THE END.





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